

A BETTER WAY



LEARNING TO ENDURE

H E B R E W S

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A BETTER WAY, LEARNING TO ENDURE: HEBREWS

Adult Bible Study Leader's Guide

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How to Use *Life Design*



LIFE DESIGN: Bible Study Designed for the Life You Live. These Bible study materials are designed to engage adult learners in inductive Bible study and in applying the truths of that study to their daily lives.

As you prepare to teach these lessons, keep these two factors in mind:

- The **FOCUS** of productive adult Bible learning is the learner. The intent of teaching is not teaching, but learning—the learner’s learning.
- The **GOAL** of productive adult Bible learning is an appropriate life-response to Biblical truth. You do not teach simply to impart information; you teach so that the Holy Spirit of God can use the truths of the Word of God to change the child of God into the image of the Son of God.

The Lesson Plan

Each *Life Design* lesson has three distinct parts. **GETTING STARTED** is the attention-getter. The questions and activities “set the table,” as it were, for the Bible study. **SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES** is the heart of the lesson. A series of inductive Bible study questions leads the teacher and learners through the Biblical text. **MAKING IT PERSONAL** applies the truth to life.

As is true of any teaching experience, you can adapt the parts of the lesson to fit your particular class. You may choose to alter the beginning activities or change

the focus of the application. You will find more material in the Bible study than you can cover in one class session. Ask God to help you as you tailor the lesson for your learners.

The Study Book

This leader’s guide is designed to accompany the Bible study book. As the teacher, you will want a copy of the Bible study. Commit to working through the questions before you plan your lesson. We encourage you to distribute Bible study books to your learners. Urge them to complete the study before class. The more your learners have studied on their own, the better the class discussions will be. When a question in the leader’s guide is picked up from the Bible study book, you will notice the question number in parentheses. The answers to the questions are usually in the lesson commentary. They are also grouped together in the back of this book.

Other Resources

If you want to use transparencies as you teach, a packet of sixteen full-color transparencies is available. If you prefer to use PowerPoint, the resource CD includes a PowerPoint presentation for each lesson.

Some teachers stay very close to the outline as they teach. If this is true of you, and if you want your learners to capture that outline, reproducible in-class worksheets are included on the CD. The same worksheets may be downloaded from the Web and photocopied for class members. Visit www.regularbaptistpress.org/downloads or www.rbpadultministries.org. Thank you for choosing *Life Design* teaching materials. May God richly bless you and your learners as you study and apply His Word.

Preface

Hebrews is one of the most crucial books in the Bible for Christians who face the challenges of today. The writer of Hebrews was addressing a group of Jewish Christians in the first century who were struggling with persecution. They were becoming weary as they faced criticism and hostility. Some of them were in danger of turning back to Judaism rather than persevering in their professed faith in Christ.

In this extended sermon, the writer demonstrated how Christianity is the climax of God's program of salvation. Christ is better than the most revered figures of the Old Testament. He is also the reality Who was prefigured in the Old Testament shadows. As these Christians faced the prospect of even greater suffering for Christ, they needed to remember that He understood their pain, He was committed to them as their priest, and He would help them to endure.

For many people today Hebrews is hard to understand because it refers so frequently to the Old Testament. The first recipients of the book were Jewish, so they would have been very familiar with the Old Testament laws, customs, and texts that the author used. Christians in the present time typically do not have a thorough background in the Old Testament, so for many of them, Hebrews seems like it was written in a strange dialect.

Rather than getting confused with the difficult details of Hebrews, what we need to keep clearly in mind is the overall purpose of this great sermon. The writer was challenging his readers, people like us, to stay committed to Christ instead of drifting away from courageous faith in Him. Though most Christians in the western world today do not face the same kinds of persecution that threatened the first-century Christians, we do find ourselves confronted with increasing opposition from the culture. If we keep looking unto Jesus, Who is the author and finisher of our faith, then we will be able to run with endurance the race that is set before us. Hebrews urges us to recognize that Christ is supreme and to live our lives with that truth clearly in view.

Resources for This Course

The transparency packet for this course (RBP0012) includes a transparency on which to record the summary statements from each lesson on Hebrews. The transparency will help you track and review these lessons. Starting with lesson 1, use transparency 1 at the end of each lesson or at the beginning of the next lesson to record the summary statement for each lesson. You may use the suggestions in this leader's guide or ask your learners to suggest summary statements.

The Resource CD (RBP0013) for this course includes a PowerPoint presentation for each lesson. All of the transparencies are part of the PowerPoint presentation. The transparencies are also included on the CD as printable PDFs. If you would like to make your own transparencies or PowerPoint slides, the CD includes backgrounds ready for your own text.

To help in your promotion of this course, the CD includes a PowerPoint slide, posters, and a flyer. You can add your group's information to all of the promotional material.

The CD also provides in-class worksheets. Each in-class worksheet has a fill-in-the-blank outline that follows the corresponding outline in this leader's guide.

Other classroom resources on the CD include visuals and handouts. The leader's guide refers to each visual as a resource. Each resource is included in the correspond-

ing PowerPoint presentation. Instructions on when to use the handouts are included in this leader's guide.

The CD also offers supplemental case studies. Each case study can be used as an in-class review, as material for a midweek Bible study, or as an e-mail attachment to your learners. E-mailing the case studies to your learners will emphasize living out the truth in daily life. You may want to enlist a learner to handle collecting e-mail addresses and e-mailing the case studies each week.

You will also find two supplemental application ideas on the CD. Use these ideas as handouts at the end of the appropriate lessons or as e-mail attachments. Both ideas could form the basis for class projects. Read through the ideas before you begin teaching this course so you can plan ahead how you will use them.

In addition, the CD includes a printable verse card for each lesson's key verse or verses. Blank verse cards are also included so you can enter different or additional verses for your learners to memorize. For your convenience, the verse cards are set for printing on Avery business cards. Use the Avery product number 8869 to avoid cutting apart the verse cards. You can find Avery business cards at avery.com. You could also simply print the verse cards on heavy paper and cut them apart using a paper cutter. Or you could e-mail the verse cards to your learners and have them print and cut their own.

LESSON 1

Continuing with Christ

Scripture Focus

Hebrews Overview

Key Verse

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

Overview

The book of Hebrews was written to a group of Jewish Christians who were facing great pressures in their spiritual lives. The writer challenged them to recognize Christ as the climax of God’s program of salvation and to live with that truth clearly in view. This would give them hope and strength to stand as Christians.

Topic

Focus in life

Theme

To keep your faith strong, you must keep your focus on Christ.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will make progress in focusing on Christ in some specific area(s) where he or she often fails to consider Him.

Outline

- I. Writer
- II. Recipients
- III. Date
- IV. Theme
- V. Purpose
- VI. Form

Materials

- Rice cake
- Masking tape
- Note cards
- RBP Transparencies 1–3
- Case study for lesson 1 from resource CD
- Hebrews 12:2 verse card from resource CD

Getting Started

Focus Exercise

Ask a volunteer to walk on a masking tape line from the back of the room to you. Enlist the help of other students to try to distract the volunteer as he or she walks the line.

Ask the volunteer how he or she accomplished the journey. Ask: What did you focus on or think about?

Rice Cakes for the Mind

Show a rice cake to the class. Explain that some dieters carry low-cal snacks at all times so when they are attracted to eat something unhealthy, they have a better alternative close at hand. **Ask:** What could Christians, who need to keep focused on Christ in this very distracting world, learn from this practice?

The theme of Hebrews is “keeping your faith strong by focusing on Christ.” **Discuss:** What does it mean to “focus” on Christ? What kinds of distractions or obstacles do we encounter in our spiritual lives that urge us to take our focus off Christ? (Questions 1, 2)

The book of Hebrews is an exhortation (13:22) written to a group of Jewish Christians encouraging them to keep strong their commitment to Christ because He is superior to all else. The discouragement that they were feeling threatened to detour them in their spiritual lives. The writer challenged them to consider the superiority of Christ over every possible religious allegiance. In addition, he used the example of past heroes of faith to stimulate them to faithfulness in their lives.

Searching the Scriptures

I. Author

Unlike most of the epistles in the New Testament, the book of Hebrews does not directly identify its writer. From the earliest years of Christianity numerous possible human writers have been suggested.

In many Bibles the title of the book of Hebrews indicates the book was written by Paul. Several of the early scholars in the Christian center of Alexandria, Egypt, during the third century AD held that Paul wrote the book. In the fifth century the influential voices of the scholar Jerome and the theologian Augustine championed Paul’s authorship of Hebrews.

On the other hand, there are many longstanding and significant objections to Paul as the writer of Hebrews. The book was not included in the earliest lists of Paul’s epistles.

One key factor arguing against Paul’s being the writer is the language used in the book. Paul’s letters are all marked by their abrupt style and frequent digressions from the main point into other issues. By contrast, Hebrews is an example of highly polished Greek, which follows the patterns of careful construction and highly sophisticated language taught in classical Greek rhetoric.

A more direct objection to Paul’s authorship of Hebrews comes from Hebrews 2:3. In this verse the writer stated that he received the message of salvation through those who were eyewitnesses of Christ’s ministry. By contrast, Paul said in Galatians 1:12 that he received the gospel not from men, but through the direct revelation of Jesus Christ.

These objections to Paul's authorship of Hebrews have led to many speculations about who could have written the book. Martin Luther argued that Apollos is a likely choice. Others have suggested Silas or other minor New Testament figures. There is not enough evidence to prove or disprove these possible writers.

As far as the identity of the writer, it is probably best to accept the conclusion of Origen, who said around AD 225, "But who wrote the Epistle, God only knows certainly." While we do not know the writer's name, we can, however, discern a few things about him. He was a second-generation Christian who had mastered both the Old Testament Scriptures and Greek rhetoric. His combination of careful explanation and fervent exhortation shows that he was a pastor-theologian, whose keen mind was matched by his compassionate heart. In this he is an excellent model for godly leaders of every age.

READ: 2 Timothy 3:16. **ASK:** Although we cannot be definite about the human writer of Hebrews, what can we know for certain about its authorship? (Question 3)

READ: 2 Peter 1:21. **ASK:** How was God able to use fallible humans to write His Word and in spite of that have the written Word be without error? (Question 4)

II. Recipients

Just as the writer of Hebrews is unnamed, so the book does not identify its intended, original recipients. From at least AD 175 onward, the title "To the Hebrews" has been attached to this book. Therefore, from an early date many Christians have believed that the first recipients of Hebrews were Jewish Christians.

The content of Hebrews certainly supports that conclusion. The book is full of quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament. The many mentions of the Old Testament sacrificial system would have been difficult for a Gentile audience to understand, but people reared in Judaism would comprehend the argument immediately.

READ: Romans 1:16. **ASK:** What is God's vehicle for saving Jews in this dispensation? How can a Jewish person be saved? **READ:** Romans 10:1, 2. **ASK:** According to these verses why are not more Jews saved? **DISCUSS:** Should believers today share Paul's attitude about the salvation of Jewish people? Why? (Questions 5–8)

The recipients were likely a house church who had a good record of Christian commitment and service (6:10) even in the heat of suffering (10:32–34).

Nevertheless, some had become discouraged and weary in their spiritual struggles, because they were focusing on the present trouble rather than on their future glory in Christ.

The book of Hebrews challenged the recipients to renew their wholehearted commitment to Christ. They had been Christians long enough to be teachers (5:12), but in spiritual terms they were underachievers.

READ: Hebrews 5:12–14. **ASK:** How did the writer describe the spiritual condition of the recipients?

READ: 1 Corinthians 3:1–3 **ASK:** What descriptive title did Paul use of the believers at Corinth? What behaviors revealed their immature condition? (Questions 9–11)

Like the believers in Corinth and many Christians today, the original recipients of Hebrews were living well below their capacity. This regrettable condition needed to be changed.

TRANSPARENCY: Display transparency 2. **DISCUSS:** What steps can a distracted believer take to get his or her focus back on Christ? (Question 12) (Record learners' answers on the transparency.)

While the writer was convinced that most of his readers were genuine believers (6:9), he feared some might not have truly trusted Christ. Therefore, he gave strong warnings about turning away from the Lord.

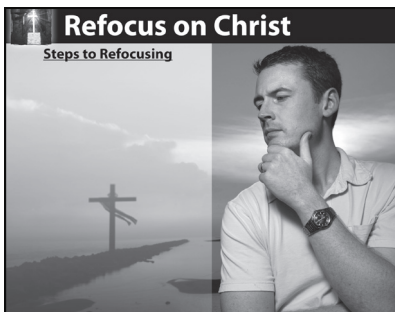
III. Date

Because the writer and the recipients of Hebrews are unspecified, its date is also a matter of debate. Several pieces of evidence in the text, however, can help to suggest a reasonable date for the book.

In Hebrews 2:3 the recipients are described as second-generation Christians who heard the gospel from the apostles or others, who themselves were eyewitnesses of Christ. The original leaders of the church apparently had died, for the readers were exhorted to remember their words and imitate their faith (13:7). In addition, there had been a significant period of time since the recipients were saved, certainly long enough that they should have grown to spiritual maturity (5:12). These references would tend to indicate that perhaps twenty or thirty years had elapsed since the beginning of Christianity. That would set a probable earliest date for Hebrews at around AD 60.

The latest date of composition that is possible is in the early 90s. Around AD 96 Hebrews is quoted by an early Christian leader named Clement. For Clement to refer to Hebrews, the book must have been both written and circulated prior to that time. Statements like 10:11 indicate that Levitical sacrifices were still being offered in the temple at Jerusalem. That being true, the latest date of composition would be a time prior to 70 AD when the temple was destroyed and the Jews were dispersed by the Roman armies.

That the readers had recently experienced suffering and that worse perse-



cution was on the way is clear. It may well be, then, that Hebrews was written between the fire of Rome (AD 64), which Nero blamed on the Christians, and his death in 68. Around that same time, in 67, the Jewish rebellion against Rome began in Jerusalem. It is quite likely, then, that Hebrews was written between 64 and 67.

READ: Galatians 4:4. **ASK:** When did Christ come into the world? In light of this, when could we say Hebrews was written? (Questions 13, 14)

IV. Theme

The book of Hebrews develops several key themes. Because the recipients were Christians who had grown fearful and hesitant to stand for Christ—and perhaps included some who were not yet truly saved—Hebrews emphasizes the need to listen to and live by God's truth in Christ. Throughout the entire book the readers were reminded that God has spoken in Christ and that His Word must be obeyed.

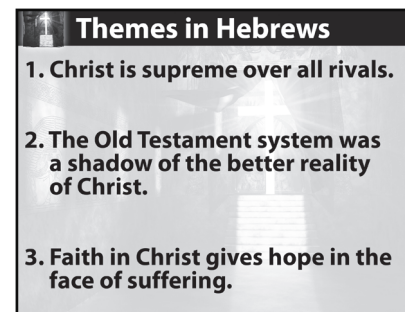
READ: Matthew 7:24–27. **ASK:** What did Jesus teach about obedience to His Word in this passage? (Question 15)

TRANSPARENCY: Display transparency 3. Uncover the themes of Hebrews as you discuss them.

The first seven chapters of Hebrews stress the supremacy of Christ. The writer used Old Testament references in chapter 1 to demonstrate that Christ is superior to the angels through whom the law was given. In chapter 3 the writer showed that Christ is superior to Moses the great leader of Israel, and in 4:1–13 Christ is presented as superior to Joshua, who led Israel in the conquest of Canaan. In the end of chapter 4 and in all of chapters 5 and 7, Christ is compared to Aaron as the superior priest. By proving the supremacy of Christ over each of these key Old Testament figures whom the Jews venerated, the writer established the superiority of New Testament Christianity.

READ: Colossians 1:15–19. **ASK:** How do these verses demonstrate that Christ deserves preeminence? (Question 16)

Hebrews 8:1–10:18 focuses on the relationship of Christianity to the Old Covenant (Testament) system of worship. The Old Testament system is not viewed as bad, but as inferior to the better approach to God in the New Covenant. The sacrifices and priesthood of the Old Testament were God's provision for the time before the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross. Even though God gave the Old Testament system, it is not binding on Christians today, for it was merely a shadow that pointed ahead to the better reality of

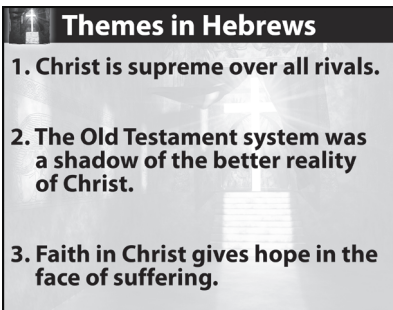


Themes in Hebrews

1. Christ is supreme over all rivals.
2. The Old Testament system was a shadow of the better reality of Christ.
3. Faith in Christ gives hope in the face of suffering.

Christ. Christianity is part of the New Covenant, the internal spiritual worship of God, which was prophesied in the Old Testament.

The final chapters of the book (10:19—13:25) teach that faith in Christ gives hope in the face of suffering. To those tempted to shrink back in fear, Hebrews gives a challenge to costly commitment to Christ. If Christianity is God's best, then it demands our best.



TRANSPARENCY: Continue to display transparency 3. **DISCUSS:** How are each of the themes of Hebrews relevant for the church today? (*Christ is still the preeminent Head of the church, and He still demands our submission to His leadership. God's program and mission for the church haven't changed since the writing of Hebrews. Christ is still the believer's primary source of hope in the midst of suffering.*)

V. Purpose

As the writer composed Hebrews, he had several main purposes in mind. He knew that his readers were weary from suffering, so he endeavored to encourage them. Hebrews is full of challenges to steadfast endurance in faith (12:3).

In addition, the writer wanted to counteract their tendency toward apostasy (10:29). He warned them against the dreadful consequences of slipping away from Christ. Instead of forsaking their distinctive Christian position, they needed to maintain their loyalty to Christ.

READ: Hebrews 10:29. **ASK:** How does this verse describe the actions of apostates? (Question 17)

As a practical help, the writer also encouraged the Christians to support one another in the face of persecution. The Body of Christ is a crucial part of God's resource for equipping Christians. Some of the readers were neglecting the rest of the congregation. By renewing their commitment to one another, they could encourage one another.

READ: Hebrews 10:24, 25. **ASK:** How have you seen the exhortations in this verse carried out in your church? (Question 18)

The major purpose of Hebrews was to use the facts of Christ to cure the fear of Christians. By discussing at length how the Lord is superior to all rivals for human worship, the writer revealed that Christ is the focus of God's program. Only Christ is worthy of worship, for He is supreme even over all of the Old Testament worship system. Though the Christians would have to face renewed suffering in the future, they could stand in faith if they kept looking unto Jesus (12:1–4).

READ: Hebrews 12:1–3. **ASK:** How do you think the recipients responded when they read these words

from Paul about Christ? How can focusing on Christ cure fear? (Questions 19, 20)

Hebrews contains much theology, especially about Christ, and it has an intensely practical purpose. It endeavors to motivate struggling Christians to become stable Christians. If they can understand the incredible preeminence of Christ, then they should cling to Christ rather than slipping away in fear. Hebrews counteracts their fear by reinforcing their faith.

VI. Form

In many Bibles, Hebrews is called an epistle, or a letter. However, unlike the typical letters in the New Testament, Hebrews does not contain a greeting identifying the writer and the recipients. Neither does it contain the words of prayer and thanksgiving or the personal references that are typical in epistles.

Hebrews is more than a letter, it is a word of exhortation (13:22). As Acts 13:15 illustrates, a word of exhortation is a form of sermon that expounds the truth of Scripture. The introduction to Hebrews in 1:1–4 is much more appropriate as the formal opening sentence of a sermon than it is of a letter.

As a sermon, Hebrews is a spoken message that was written to be heard. Its intricate construction evidences that it was carefully thought out before it was written. The writer used language very skillfully so that the hearers would receive the full impact of his message. Consequently, he frequently employed the sounds of words and unusual word order to make the message more powerful.

DISCUSS: What practical steps could we take so that Hebrews will impact us as an exhortation during this course of study?

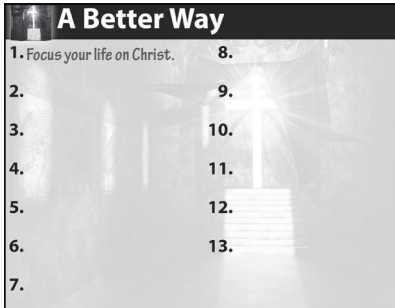
Paul's epistles typically teach doctrine first and then the duty that should result. Hebrews, however, alternates between exposition of truth and exhortation to obey. Hebrews mingles application throughout the message, rather than leaving it all for the end.

As a sermon, Hebrews endeavors to persuade the hearers. The writer persuaded in two ways: he reinforced the beliefs that the hearers already had, and he described the future benefits of following his exhortations. By combining these strategies, Hebrews provides a potent message designed to build up the Christian faith of the readers.

Making It Personal

Focus Commitment

Distribute note cards, and ask learners to write two areas in their spiritual lives in which they need to focus on Christ. Encourage students to keep these cards in their Bibles as a reminder throughout this Hebrews study.

**Case Study**

Distribute the case study for lesson 1 to the learners. Have a learner read the case study. Use the questions on the case study to lead a discussion.

Review Transparency

Use transparency 1 to review the Better Way for this lesson: Focus your life on Christ.

Memory Verse

Distribute copies of the Hebrews 12:2 verse card from the resource CD. Encourage the learners to memorize the verse.
