

Reading Schedule for March 12-18, 2018

This our third week in the Book of Hebrews, and we will wrap up with the inspiring message of faith, the practicality of being disciplined by God, as well as some final exhortations from this less read book. I am so glad for these three weeks that we have focused on the message of Hebrews, which elevates Christ and helps us understand the significance of his sacrifice. These last three chapters are unique, but equally as helpful.

March 12 - Hebrews 11:1-7: “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” (v.1) We see that the author wants to define faith, with words like assurance, certainty, and conviction. I think you can define faith as a settled confidence that something in the future will actually come to pass because God will bring it about. Sometimes people define faith with these words, “a leap in the dark.” But that’s not the faith of the Bible. The object of our faith is the reliability of God and the certainty that he will take care of us. We place our personal faith in Jesus Christ, who saves us and is with us. We will never be alone. This is a chapter about faith, and these examples will stir up your faith, I am quite sure. How do you define faith?

March 13 - Hebrews 11:8-19: “By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son . . .” (v.17) I’ve always thought of Abraham as an example of what God has done for us through his own Son. Genesis 22:1-19 records the story of Abraham being willing to sacrifice his son, Isaac. I think it is interesting that the author brings up the fact that God could raise Isaac from the dead, again pointing to the parallel between Isaac and Jesus, the one and only Son of God. Abraham is clearly a great example of faith. He did not have perfect faith, but when he was tested, his faith would remain strong. How do you see faith in Abraham? Why is he the one that is referenced the most in this chapter?

March 14 - Hebrews 11:20-40: “Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection.” (v.35) This begins a section of honest difficulty in that they did not receive what they had hoped for. They went through huge suffering and remained faithful, and are being rewarded for it in heaven. I don’t know why some people think this is an exception in the Christian life. I have experienced it as the norm. My pain is not severe, and the challenges I face are not hugely difficult compared to others, but I would still characterize life as full of troubles. This helps me to not count on this life for my happiness. Faith says that I can be assured that God is in control and that he is working all things out for the good. These verses tell us that those who suffered were commended because of their faith. They have experienced something far better than this life could ever offer. How do you respond to these words about faith? What gets your attention?

March 15 - Hebrews 12:1-13: “Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?” (v.7) I almost broke this section into two because the first four verses are especially inspiring, but the message about God disciplining us is so practical. In fact, verse 7 is a biblical truth that my son Trevor has tattooed on his forearm. We concluded Hebrews 11, about having faith during difficult times, and now the author suggested hardship points to God’s work in our life to refine us. The goal in verse 11 says hardship produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. These tests are for our benefit. They prove our connection to God and they require a response of endurance

that can only come as we lean into the Lord. These are very helpful words, and they can be used in your life so that you are able to redefine hardship as something that is worth thanking God for. Do you agree? How do you respond to these principles?

March 16 - Hebrews 12:14-29: “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire.’” (v. 28 & 29) We wrap up the section with these verses. I have to admit that the phrase, “God is a consuming fire,” got my attention. I have been meditating on God’s greatness. Even as I have been studying Romans 9-11, I have been thinking about my understanding of God as being too small. God’s holiness, and his position as judge of all the earth, makes him worthy of worship in and of itself. Even though God is compassionate, he also must be seen as strong and completely sovereign. I like this reading because it emphasizes characteristics of God that I need to remember. Eternity is in the Lord’s hands, from beginning to end. I hope you will be renewed in your gratitude, and your heart will be moved to worship, as you read through these verses about a kingdom that cannot be shaken. What inspires you about these words?

March 17 - Hebrews 13:1-10: “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’” (v.5) Of all these exhortations, I was thinking about the temptation to love money. The message that permeates our society is that money will make you happy. But we know through many examples that there is never enough money to make you truly happy. Happiness would be defined as “having a little more money than I have right now.” That is a worldly happiness. The kind of joy that is offered as a gift from God could be defined as contentment. Contentment comes from trusting in God that he will take care of you. The Apostle Paul said that he had learned the secret of being content with plenty or in want. I encourage you to settle with living on less, rather than desiring more. Christians that become materialistic are saying by their actions that God can’t take care of them. The antidote for the love of money is to trust God to meet all your needs. This is the exhortation that caught my attention. Which of these verses spoke to you? Why?

March 18 - Hebrews 13:11-25: “Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.” (v.17) As a leader in the church I know this could be true. When people want to partner with me for the Gospel, it is an exciting adventure. But when people are critical and gossip, this can be the most challenging aspects of a Pastor’s life. I found a great deal of joy at New Harvest, and that is because there has been a comradery and a great deal of support that has made serving God a joy for me. I am confident that one day when I give an account to God about my leadership at New Harvest, it will be an incredible joy to me and to you, because we served God in harmony with all our hearts. Thank you for being such a wonderful church; it is a privilege to serve God with you. What exhortation in this final section of Hebrews caught your attention? Why?

Prayers - Pray for our community outreach as we have the Food Bank this Saturday, the After School Program Tuesday and Thursday, plus many other opportunities to make a difference in the lives of our neighbors.