

Remembering to do Good

Menno Mennonite Church
August 31 2025

Purpose: To connect the advice of how to do the work of Christian life to the faith that was exemplified to the Hebrews.

Message: We are given the hope of doing good not as a simple matter of good advice but as a way of carrying forward the work of faith.

Scripture: Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16 (I will read) Luke 14:1, 7-14

Synopsis: We all receive good advice. Most of it we hear, appreciate, and then let it wash out of us as if it were a wave on the sea. It is mere exhortation that doesn't have a huge impact, even if it is reasonable advice. Here the preacher of the Hebrews is doing more than just issuing good ideas; they are connecting the way of being of Christ to the way of being as a consequence of faith. It is an exhortation that comes directly from the consequence of the witness of faith we have (chapter 11) and the way of Christ we are offered (chapter 12). We are confident in it not because it will pay dividends, but because it is the way we are lead to know God's will.

Hebrews 13:-18, 15-16

13 Keep loving each other like family.

² Don't neglect to open up your homes to guests,
because by doing this some have been hosts to angels without knowing it.

³ Remember prisoners as if you were in prison with them,
and people who are mistreated as if you were in their place.

⁴ Marriage must be honored in every respect,
with no cheating on the relationship,
because God will judge the sexually immoral person
and the person who commits adultery.

⁵ 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.

⁶ This is why we can confidently say,
*The Lord is my helper,
and I won't be afraid.
What can people do to me?*

⁷ Remember your leaders who spoke God's word to you.
Imitate their faith as you consider the
way their lives turned out.

⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever!

¹⁵ So let's continually offer up a sacrifice of praise through him,
which is the fruit from our lips that confess his name.

¹⁶ Don't forget to do good
and to share what you have because
God is pleased with these kinds of sacrifices.

Good advice comes easy. Well, let me rephrase that perhaps—advice comes easily. The quality of that advice is likely in the eye of the beholder. If there is a matter of human endeavor out there, there is a commentator who is willing to steer a course on how to tackle the problem with a whole Greek chorus of people telling them how very wrong they are in every possible way. More likely than not there is at least someone down there that is not there to speak the affirmations of your project and ideas. I catch myself doing this too as I find myself enjoying some vicarious project content (I enjoy watching things get built—sue me) and finding myself quite sure that I know a far better way to accomplish the task they are struggling with on the screen. Thus far I keep myself within the limits of safely admonishing people verbally and not actually going down to the comments with my “wisdom,” trying to remember that right wrong or otherwise I am the one on the couch and not the one actually doing the thing. But the temptation is real. That said, the right word at the right time in the right way can save a whole lot of heartache and pain. We do well to listen to advice for our sanity and safety, but we also remember that

The letter to the Hebrews, really most of the epistles, could be easily mistaken for just advice; a bit of theological Anne Landers as people work out the ways of doing this thing that we call church. I have grown to love the letters that we have for a whole lot of reasons—their tone and compassion, the systematic theology that finds its roots within them (a mixed blessing to be sure, but it is an element to be considered) as well as the way that they are so relatable written seemingly in the Second person as if we are the you they were first intended to address. But what takes the cake is actually something that I think we do well to remember all the time: that these are the artifacts that bear proof to the difficulty and the brokenness of what it is to follow Christ in the first place, even more so to follow Christ together in the body. As tempting and seductive as it is to think that the church *should* be something without spot or wrinkle and a club for people who have gotten the easy answer to life, the epistles remind us that from the very first the question of how to live a life of faith was alive and well within the communities trying to take it on. It reminds us that the body is human, for all of the good, the bad and the ugly that this means. But that very humanity does not stop God from using the body to build and found the kingdom all the same.

Hebrews is building just such a case. If you recall—really one of the primary elements that you will recall of Hebrews in the common way—we have the recounting of all the

predecessors of faith, the cloud of witnesses that inspire us toward faith and a way of being in the world that is indeed different. Chapter 12 expands on this, exhorting us to take on the diligence of running well and true this relay that is taking us toward that which is promised. We are invited into the disciplines of *doing faith*, of being one of these runners, accepting for ourselves the challenges of taking on this life of faith.

But living faithfully is one of these grand notions that always needs to be followed with the query to be sure: yes, but what precisely do you mean by that? Faithful living finds a whole breadth of definition and expression in lived reality, and sometimes faith can just be left to be the declaration of Jesus loves me and I love Jesus right back without a great deal of concern of the consequential nature of that declaration. What the Hebrews preacher is doing here is continuing his argument regarding faith right from noting the witnesses to faith, to receiving the charge of being disciplined within faith to now putting flesh into the way of faith. In this we are taken from just more advice (as we generally read this and the letters like this) to receiving the life giving coaching toward making faith and faithful living more and more real in utterly reasonable and realistic ways.

This is accomplished ultimately by building an argument for how to live the way of Christ from the inside out. We know that the great commandments given us is “love God with all your heart, soul, and mind and your neighbor as yourself”. We know that the great argument is, always, “so what does that mean, and how exclusive of a neighborhood can I possibly build for myself?” It was the immediate question that Jesus faced and the challenge that is with us to this very day. The human impulse is always to find the best letter of the law satisfaction for the demands we see before us, forgetting that when we do love God with all of ourselves, that very love will always work on us to build a still wider circle of people that it is ours to love. Even those who we wish we could not neglect, or at least grumble about with immunity are brought back to us always with “are they not too my children? Did I not also come to seek and save even them?”

This starts close to home from the Hebrews preacher, with the people you love most dearly. Honoring the marriages that sustain you and knowing them not simply as vessels of individual gratification, but as an expression of that which is most dear to you becomes important in the context of faith. It's a reminder that Jesus' friends don't just live by faith in church, at work or in the living room. We also serve God acceptably in our bedroom as well. We

honor not just our spouses but also our community by remaining faithful even in our most intimate relationships.

It doesn't stop there. In verse 1 Hebrews' narrator stretches the reach of the life of faith from the biological to the Christological family. "*Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters [Philadelphia]*" (1). Those who live by faith do good by treating our fellow Christians not as strangers or even just friends, but as our siblings in Christ. People whose elder adopted brother is Jesus serve God acceptably when we work and pray for our Christian brothers and sisters' well-being. Part of living the life of faith is to continue to love and be held in love by the relationships that define us.

Of course, those relationships are also part of what stretches us as well. Not all of our family members we are told are physically close to us, related biologically, emotionally or even physically. We are invited to see all those around us as part of those who we know and treat as family. So we are invited to show hospitality to strangers. We show what we hope for and reflect that which we do not yet see in how we show generosity to those around us, even those who we know as strangers. It is a challenge. It rubs us the wrong way. It scares us. We read time and again about how strangers cannot and sometimes are not safe. We reminded of this horribly again this week. Yet I wonder; and I offer this with nothing but the greatest humility as a challenge to myself as much as any of you; I wonder where we got the impression that faith lived fully was meant to be a guarantor of safety. We wish it were so, but from Jesus on out we are told that it is not. It is an unspeakable comfort. It is a security that is beyond anything that we can imagine. Just not in the sense of our own personal security overrides the imperatives of faith. I am reminded of C S Lewis *Narnia* stories as they describe the figure of Aslan, for all his compassion, love and greatness in all things and all times, we are also reminded continuously that this lion of being is never a tame lion. Christ is good, loving, caring, and all the rest; but never ever tame.

Still the witness of faithfulness expands. We are to remember the persecuted not in the abstract, but as if we ourselves were in their shoes. It gets wider still: Do good and share with others. Acceptable service to God knows no human boundaries. Worshiping God with awe and reverence includes working for the "common good" (The Message) of all people, but perhaps especially those who are our enemies and whom society shoves to its margins. By faith Jesus'

followers share with others because we know that everything we have is a gift of God's grace that isn't ours' to hoard in the first place.

The Hebrews sermon is a good one then and a good one now. It reminds us to remember that which is so easily forgotten. We forget and believe that we are alone in the race. We are not, and have a whole cloud of witnesses working with us to connect us and inspire us. We forget that those around us are our opportunities to experience and extend the kingdom, and not a burden to be dealt with. We forget that while we ourselves are finite, we serve, finally an infinite God who gives all that we could ever ask or need.

In remembering all this of God, we can live a life in faith because we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is able to be trusted. It can be easy to act in ways that show that we might not be sure of that which we hope for or really know what we ourselves have seen. But we are invited always to live fully this way because that which we know of God. That is the work, the life, and the fullness of faith that is its own reward.

I want leave you with a lovely paraphrase offered by *The Message* ending this reading. It is this: "God takes particular pleasure in acts of worship – a different kind of 'sacrifice' – that take place in the kitchen and workplace and on the streets." May we ever know this sacrifice and fit our faith in the solid provision of the God who holds us.