



Calvary LifeGroup Leader's Guide

Week of 9/26/21

Warm Up

Never underestimate the power of a good opening question...one that gets people on to a single topic and allows them to step in gently rather than diving into the deep end of the conversational pool. A LifeGroup facilitator is looking for an "in" to a genuine conversation. Take the metaphor of a bus departing a routine stop. The bus driver must slowly get back up to speed to merge into traffic. You can't floor the bus and swerve into the lane. You have people standing and walking the aisle on their way to a seat. As a "bus driver," you are helping those in the group get to a place of deep and genuine conversation.

Icebreaker questions get everyone warmed up and into the conversation. Don't overlook fun, simple, or whimsical questions to get people ready to talk about important things later. Starting a conversation is an art and leading a discussion to more heartfelt things takes time. Icebreakers and group openers used purposefully lead to a successful conversation.

Icebreaker: What warnings have you ignored or tended to not take too seriously?
Conversely, what warnings grab your attention?

This question leads into the warning that starts off the passage for this week. If you're struggling for examples of warnings, you might think of things ranging from those scary warning labels on mattresses and plastic bags, to severe weather warnings.

Discussion Questions for Hebrews Chapter 4:1-13

Read Hebrews 4:1-13 as a group, then select 2-3 questions from below to discuss together.

1. This chapter begins with a warning about the danger of hearing good news that ends up doing us no good! What, according to verse 2, kept the good news from being of benefit?

The "wilderness generation" failed to respond with faith to what they heard—"they were not united by faith with those who listened." A lack of faith is akin to not listening at all when good news is proclaimed.

Is this warning still relevant to us today? If so, how?

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and loving others.*

YES! We have an even greater level of God's revelation through the New Testament. In addition, we have unprecedented access to the gospel today through all of the various translations of Scripture, Bible apps, on-demand teaching, etc. In all, it's very easy for us to hear the good news...which means there's an even greater potential for us to be self-deceived (James 1:22-25), thinking we're "good" simply because we've heard a lot.

2. The word, *rest*, is repeated 11 times as either a verb or noun between 3:11 and 4:11 as the author reflects back to Psalm 95 and Genesis 2:2 (Heb 4:4). What comes to your mind when you think of *rest*? Now, what do you think this passage means by *rest*? This is not an easy question to answer (hence the long explanation here), but one that's really important to this passage! It's normal for us to think of *rest* along the lines of "ceasing from activity or toil." That probably doesn't capture all that's meant here.

Rest is a theologically rich idea that goes back to Genesis 2 when God rested after the six days of creation. For humanity, this "7th-day Sabbath rest" coincided with God's call for humanity to actively engage in the task of filling, caring for, and cultivating all that God had made (Gen 1:28-31). Sin, of course, became a barrier to God's presence and purposes.

The Promised Land represented a space where God's people were to experience a sense of rest, or blessing, in spite of the Fall (see, for example, Deut 12:10) as they followed God's revelation given to Moses. The practice of Sabbath likewise represented a time each week to stop laboring and celebrate God's provision. Their disobedience (see Ps 95!) kept them from enjoying this "rest."

Altogether, we can think of rest as the future state for God's people that all of history is headed towards. A taste of it is possible now, but the fullness will come with Christ's return (see Matt 11:28-29). It's a still-future full restoration of what was lost in the Fall—when the enemy of sin will no longer enslave or frustrate us.

3. This passage emphasizes that God's promise of rest is still available (see verses 1, 6, 9, 11). What's required for a person to experience it or not? The determining factor is faith expressed through obedience to God's commands. See verses 2, 6, and 11. It may be helpful to clarify the relationship between faith and obedience. On its own, obedience can sound like works of righteousness meant to earn God's favor. True faith (which is invisible), though, is accompanied by obedience (which is visible). The classic passage on this subject is James 2:14-26. Another "classic" is Matthew 7:24-27. Our obedience follows our belief. Obedience is the natural response of true belief in God's Word or revelation.

4. If the key to entering God's rest is faith, what do you think it means to "strive to enter" the rest that God provides in verse 11?

This relates to the previous question and explanation about the nature of true faith, which cannot be divorced from obedience to God's commands. None of us does this perfectly, which is implied by the word *strive* (defined this way by one lexicon: "*be*

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zealous/eager, take pains, make every effort). We strive, but never “arrive” this side of eternity, which is why we are in constant need of God’s grace, forgiveness, and mercy.

What does this look like in your life? How can you encourage each other to keep striving?

This is an invitation to help people think about and articulate how they are seeking to follow Jesus on a daily basis. It may be helpful for you, as the facilitator of the conversation, to go first in answering. It’s good to include how your own striving is full of imperfections and setbacks. The final part of this question invites you to look back to 3:13 from last week.

5. Verse 12 is one of the most frequently quoted verses in all of Scripture about the significance and power of God’s Word. What stands out to you as most significant? Why?

This question is intended to simply invite people to share their perspective without there being a right or wrong answer.

6. God’s word in verses 12-13 is compared with a lethal weapon that cuts us open and exposes “the thoughts and intentions” of our hearts! We’re all “naked and exposed” before God. What do you think is meant by this vivid description?

Can we just agree that this is a dense chapter?! If we think about Psalm 95, which is quoted repeatedly in chapters 3 and 4, we see an example of how the hearts of God’s people were shown to be hard when God’s word had come to them. Without God’s word spoken to them, the conditions of their hearts would be unknown; however, once it came, it was obvious that they didn’t truly believe or trust in God’s promise to deliver them into the Promised land. They didn’t trust His character or provision in spite of the many miracles He had performed to bring them up out of Egypt. In similar fashion, Scripture’s commands reveal whether we truly believe as we either act in obedience or disobedience toward God’s commands. In this way, we are all “exposed” before God.

7. Verse 13 and its language of being *hidden*, *naked*, *exposed*, and *giving account* is likely meant to remind us of Adam and Eve hiding from God in the garden in Genesis 3:8-11. How does this picture help us remember our constant need of God’s grace?

By using this imagery, the author is reminding his audience, as well as us, of our association with Adam and Eve’s sin and its consequences.

How does this reminder make you feel?

This could make people feel a bit discouraged or even fearful because of the fact that God knows everything about us. In such cases, you could use that kind of response to remind people of how God has succeeded where we have failed. He has acted on our behalf so that those things that we regret or feel shame over have been covered by Christ’s sacrifice (SPOILER ALERT: which is exactly where the author of Hebrews goes next!).

Closing

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This week, let's take a few moments praying together to remind us of God's character. Here is what you need for the prayer activity:

1. Invite everyone to settle in and take a few silent moments. Silence can be awkward if you're not used to it, but just embrace the awkward! Try 30 seconds of silent prayer.
2. Open with thanksgiving for God's character and His hand in putting your LifeGroup together.
3. Ask your LifeGroup to take a moment and declare attributes of God that makes them worship (for example, "holy," "loving," "compassionate," etc.). Let the room settle into a few moments of people saying characteristics out loud.
4. Have someone in your LifeGroup say a closing prayer to wrap up your time together.