

The Church: In Community

Hebrews 3:7-14

Leader Discussion guide

Illustrations Used:

- Parents at soccer games
- Israel in the Wilderness
- Scenario: Someone sins against you
- Jesus is our model
- Lord of the Rings: Frodo and Sam

Comprehension Questions:

1. Read the passage. What are verses 7-11 talking about?
 - a. Can someone briefly retell the story of the Exodus?
 - b. What happened at the edge of the promise land 2 years into the journey?
 - c. How did the words of the congregation have power?
2. What are some parallels between the Exodus and the Christian life? (1d)
 - a. What is 40 years in the wilderness parallel to?
 - b. Is this your experience of the Christian life?
3. What is the 4-step progression found in verses 12 and 13? Describe each step.
4. What happened in the scenario, "someone sins against you?"
 - a. Do you think this is accurate and true?
5. How do we break this progression of sin toward hardening?
 - a. Who is supposed to do the encouraging?
 - b. How do we know what to do and say?
6. What are routines of community? What is loving margin?
 - a. Why are these important?

Application Questions:

1. The Christian life, between salvation and glorification, is long and difficult at times. What parts of this long journey do you find challenging?
2. Have you ever known anyone or have you ever seen the 4-step progression go past the 2nd or 3rd step?
3. Do you know anyone who: needs to stop sinning, is lonely, is angry at times, struggles with depression, need encouragement to keep going, has been sinned against, or is in a time of loss? What do you think God could do through your friendship for them?
4. Do you need to stop sinning, are you lonely, angry at times, do you struggle with depression, do you need encouragement to keep going, have you been sinned against, or are you in a time of loss? Are you open to others moving toward you to help and encourage? Explain.
5. How can you grow in moving toward people to help them?
6. How can you grow in allowing others to know you and encourage you?

Extended Outline:

The Church: Following Jesus, in community, on mission.

- Upward component – us relating to Jesus Christ.
- Inward component - us in relationship with one another through Christ.
- Outward component - us in relationship to the world, on mission with Christ.

Soccer Illustration

1. Israel in the Wilderness

- a. Verses 7-11 are a Quote from Psalm 95, which is about The Exodus
 - i. It's a summary of the worst parts of the people of Israel during the Exodus
- b. The main idea in v7-11: Don't be like Israel.
- c. Familiar story
 - i. Israel in Egypt for 400 years as slaves under Pharaoh
 - ii. Moses was the main leader God used – Let my people go
 - iii. 10 plagues – Passover – Pharaoh says go
 - iv. Red Sea
 - v. Mana and water from the rock
 - vi. Mt. Sinai and the golden calf
 - vii. Arrive at the edge of Promise Land – 2 or 3 years after leaving Egypt. What a long trip....
 1. Send in the 12 spies for 40 days
 2. What happens next? The power of words...
 - a. Numbers 14:1-4
 - b. Hopelessness has overtaken them.
 - i. Behavioral Patterns of Israel were like a hurricane of hopelessness
 - ii. Negativism // Grumbling // Quarreling // Distrust
And they were all swept away... they wouldn't listen to truth... they were too busy doubting.
- d. The Exodus parallels the Christian life
 - i. Slave in Egypt → Slaves to sin
 - ii. Passover and rescue → Jesus died for our sin and rescues us from slavery
 - iii. Promise Land → Heaven, the new heavens and the new earth
 - iv. I skipped over the wilderness → Christian life
 1. The time between salvation and glorification
 - a. Long and difficult
 - b. We have seen God's mercy and miracles (salvation), but months or years later, do we still trust God. Do we even remember what God has done?
 - c. v8 "do not harden your hearts..."

2. The progression of sin: a warning:

- a. v12-13
- b. 4 Step Progression - sin, unbelief, turning away, hardening
 - i. evil/sin – A sin deceives us. It promises pleasure or satisfaction.
 1. This may be a new behavior or maybe it is a subtle pattern in your life.
We give into a temptation

2. By the way, if you ever sin, you are in the progression
- ii. Unbelief – subtle excusing of my sin.
 1. This is not so bad; Freedom in Christ; it makes me happy; it is not hurting anyone
 2. Backing away from the clear words of scripture
 3. Unbelief stage is: I know what God’s Word says, and I don’t believe that God knows what is best for me. (Probably don’t say that or maybe even think it, but this is what is going on.)
- iii. turning away – A loss of spiritual desire and conviction. A diminished desire for God, for his church, for the bible, for godly friendships. All the spiritual good that was once there seems distant and bitter... it’s no longer sweet
- iv. hardening – Heart crusted over with the scabs of sin. No longer tender.
 1. No longer finding joy or life in God or God’s ways.
- c. Illustration: How does this work in a real scenario: Someone sins against you.
 1. Sin – Surprised // Angry // Waiting for them to acknowledge it and ask for forgiveness or apologize. They don’t
 - a. And you tell a friend or spouse about what happened. They can’t believe it either. A little bitterness takes root.
 2. Unbelief – this is where the excusing of sin begins and we decide if we are going to act God’s way or act our way.
 - a. A couple days later you say, “I can’t believe this person did this to me and still hasn’t acknowledged it.” They need to make this right. This is injustice! ... it is growing...
 - b. The bible says to Love them // Pray for them // seek their good. → No way, they hurt me and no one is doing anything about it. They sinned against me.
 - c. You know what I am going to do? I am going to ignore them to show them that their actions hurt me.
 3. Turning Away – “I think about this all the time. I am still angry. It keeps me up at night sometimes. I don’t find reading my Bible fruitful. I don’t even want to read it. My prayer life is diminished. My desire for attending church is low because I might see them there and I don’t really want to hear the truth. Because they need to hear the truth. It is their fault this is all happening.
 - a. And added to that, they just keep on serving in that ministry. I can’t believe the church would let a person like serve.
 - b. One time a friend asked me, it seems like something is wrong between you and that person. I noticed you got really angry after that simple conversation. I told that friend that they had no idea the kind of hurt this person has caused to my life. Don’t even go there.
 4. Hardening – Months later, and even years later.
 - a. At this point the original incident may not even be important because all of the waves of punishment I have been trying to send to that person have totally transformed my walk with the Lord, my life at church, and my general joy, happiness, and thankfulness.

- d. Who is this warning for? All of us
 - i. All of us are somewhere on that progression in many areas of our life
 - 1. Maybe you identified somewhere you need to: Stop sinning
 - 2. Or maybe you are just: Lonely
 - 3. Angry
 - 4. Depressed
 - 5. Encouragement to Keep going
 - 6. Sinned against
 - 7. In a time of loss
 - 8. All of these things and a hundred more put you somewhere on the progression.
 - ii. All of us have friends, acquaintances, and family on that progression.
 - iii. You need help. There are people all around you that need help.
 - 1. So what do we do?

3. How to break this downward spiral: Encourage

- a. v13
 - i. exhort – encourage: in the face of sin (encouragement that fights sin in others)
 - 1. this encouragement is not, that is a nice shirt you are wearing today
 - 2. Gospel encouragement, loving and true words that bring life and grace.
More about that in a moment
 - ii. Who do we do this encouraging to? → one another
 - 1. Not just pastors or elders or deacons. Not just paid counselors.
 - iii. When do we do this? → every day... as long as it is called “today.”
 - 1. This means church isn’t enough. Nor Small Group. Everyday
- b. v14 - For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.
 - i. We have come to share in Christ
 - 1. As Christians, we have Christ in common. Common bond
 - ii. Our original confidence
 - 1. This is the clarity and joy that you had as a new believer. When you had the experience for the first time of being forgiven by God through Jesus, tasted grace. Felt his perfect love. Joy. Boldness. Fell of faith.
 - iii. Firm to the end
 - 1. This is the goal. By Jesus’ strength, and the Holy Spirit’s help. We are a bonded together community that lifts one another up every single day. The person who is strong on this day helping the person who is weak today. And tomorrow it might switch.
- c. What are these words that bring gospel encouragement?
 - i. Let’s start with circumstances where gospel encouragement is needed:
 - 1. For people who:
 - 2. are lonely
 - 3. struggling in parenting
 - 4. needs to Stop sinning
 - 5. Is ever Angry
 - 6. Depressed
 - 7. Encouragement to Keep going

8. Sinned against
 9. In a time of loss
 10. Struggling with finances
 11. Struggling with marriage
 12. Struggling with health
 13. Or 100 other difficult life circumstances
- ii. So what could you say to someone.
 1. Speaking truth may not be the first move... but once it was time to speak
 2. To the person who had been sinned against.
 - a. Do you know how much God loves you?
 - b. Tell me your salvation story. What were you like before Jesus saved you?
 - c. Jesus has given you so much grace. He has loved you so well.
 - d. Then get to the struggle at hand. What has this person done to you?
 - e. Compare huge forgiveness to this situation
 - f. Jesus will help you. Jesus will bring whatever justice is needed. Jesus' love is enough for you to forgive and still be whole
- d. I am just a simple Christian. How on earth am I going to do this? → It is hard to be a good friend. I wouldn't know what to say. It is often uncomfortable moving toward someone that is in pain or sin.
 - i. We have a great example.... Actually, a perfect example in Jesus and 4 books of the bible full of stories of how Jesus moved toward people to help and encourage them.
 1. He Loved them
 2. He knew them
 3. He Spoke to them
 4. He helped them do what he called them to do. (Holy Spirit)
 5. Jesus is our model. It will take some growing but you can...
 6. God is also our strength
 - e. You see, Words are supposed to be antidote to this hardening progression.
 - i. Sin is deceptive. When we are in sin we are often the guy with the log in his eye pointing out other people's speck.
 - ii. Encouraging words have the ability to cause this progression to reverse.
 - iii. Lord of the Rings: Sam and Frodo
 - f. All of this happens in community
 - i. We can only encourage and love people we know.
 - ii. So be wise when things are not falling apart in your life because this type of encouragement comes through 2 main avenues:
 1. Routines of community
 - a. Sunday Morning worship // Small Group // Friend group // Other regular gatherings where Christians are.
 2. Loving Margin
 - a. By God's providential hand, when we leave space in our life for relationships, God will bring people along who need encouragement. Loving margin is simply being a good friend, who notices others, asks caring questions, and is not in a hurry to move onto the next thing.
 - b. We leave space to be used by God to help others.

- g. I am convinced that so much of the struggle that we face in the Christian life would be significantly lessened if we simply had good friends. Gospel encouraging friends.
 - i. Do you ever feel stuck in the same old sin or stuck in your walk with God?
 - ii. Do you ever feel like the Christianity that you see in the bible is in a totally different category of joy and life compared to your experience?
 - 1. It is likely that you are living more of an isolated relational life than God would have for you in his goodness.
 - 2. If we want to experience life and growth, we must stop pretending everything is ok when it is not.
 - a. We need help. And that isn't a sin... it is God's goodness
 - iii. This won't be fixed today.
 - 1. But as we grow in love for others
 - 2. Grow In our ability to speak gospel encouragement to others
 - 3. Over time you will be strengthened. Your friends will be strengthened by you.... And our church will be strengthened.