

HEBREWS PROVIDES A MODEL FOR HOW TO ENCOURAGE “STUCK” BELIEVERS TO GET GROWING

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I. INTRODUCTION

Every church has them: believers who have the confidence of spending eternity with Jesus but who are not making progress in their spiritual life. Their stories vary. Some began to grow just after they were saved, then stalled. Others once had boldness for Christ until negative experiences from sharing the gospel of Jesus caused them to draw back and rarely mention the Lord in the presence of non-Christians.¹

First century Jewish believers to whom Hebrews was written had to deal with similar struggles as they sought to grow in their relationship with Jesus. They would have a difficult time as they abandoned their cultural practices in Judaism for their newfound faith. What God had once commanded them to do under Mosaic Law was now left behind. When faced with opposition from Jewish leaders, some of these believers pulled back and became concerned about the cost of following Christ. They began to consider compromises that would relieve some of the persecution. They began to wonder if following Jesus was really worth

¹See the Parable of the Four Soils (e.g., Luke 8:11-15). Editor's note: There are others reasons why believers get stuck including the distractions mentioned concerning the third soil: cares, riches, and the pleasures of life. In addition, poor teaching in the local church may well result in spiritual stagnation.

it. Secure in their eternal life, they contemplated “coasting” in their spiritual life. They thought they could “act” like they practiced Judaism on the outside while holding to their faith in Christ on the inside. They were not growing in their understanding of all that Jesus had accomplished for them. In fact, they were spiritually stuck and in danger of drifting (cf. Heb 2:1). But God, using an unknown writer, provided the book of Hebrews to encourage Jewish believers to continue on in their spiritual growth.

The word *stuck* is used from a pastoral perspective. From a human point of view, these believers don’t seem to be growing. Spiritually, people are either stagnant or moving either forward or backward. But from the perspective of other believers, believers who are not moving forward look *stuck* when they are not growing.

Today’s believers face similar struggles, even if they do not come from a Jewish background. Rosemarie Matlak comments:

As modern day Christians, we are beguiled and pressured to distance ourselves from Christ through false teachers, worldly philosophies, discouraging circumstances, and even persecution. As believers we all experience times of spiritual defeat and resulting feelings of rejection and weariness in our walks with God. *It can be tempting to return to our old way of life where we felt accepted and admired, where old friends included us as part of their circle, and where the pursuit of wealth and comfort rewarded us with immediate gratification.*²

One of the lessons we gain from the book of Hebrews is to see how God approaches spiritually stuck believers to encourage them to move on to maturity. The message of Hebrews is specifically aimed at those individuals who have stalled spiritually and need to get growing. This is a practical area of concern for ourselves as we seek to grow

²David Janssen and Rosemarie Matlak, *Hebrews Study Guide* (Sandy, UT: Grace Community Bible Church, 2010), 2, italics original.

in our own spiritual life and for others as we seek to spur (Heb 10:24) them on to maturity. At various times, we and other believers will get stuck in our spiritual life and need to get back on the path of growth. A valid perspective is to view the content of Hebrews as God's approach to getting believers to see the importance of growing and getting back on track spiritually.

II. A FREE GRACE PERSPECTIVE

Although the outcome of a study of Hebrews is often a game of "theological ping-pong,"³ approaching the book from a Free Grace perspective unlocks many profitable lessons God wants us to learn. The book contains four foundational truths that support a Free Grace perspective:

1. *The entire book, including the warning passages, is written to believers who have eternal life.*⁴ Hebrews is not written to a mixed audience of believers and "professing" believers. The author's comments are addressed to believers. More specifically, it was written to Jewish believers who were trusting in the Messiah, Jesus.

2. *Believers are eternally secure in their justification salvation.*⁵ The warnings of Hebrews teach that straying believers may face severe discipline from God. This discipline may include the possibility of physical death and the loss of rewards in eternity, but not loss of eternal life.

3. *This letter was written to people who had been believers for some time but had not grown as God expects.*⁶ Hence they were spiritually stuck.

4. *The overall goal of Hebrews is to encourage and challenge believers to go on to spiritual maturity.*⁷

³ I borrowed this phrase from the title of Basil Mitchell's book, *How to Play Theological Ping-Pong: And Other Essays on Faith and Reason* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991).

⁴ See, for example, Heb 3:1; 5:12-14; 6:4-5; 13:1-23.

⁵ Cf. Heb 10:10, 14.

⁶ Cf. Heb 5:11-14.

⁷ Cf. Heb 6:1.

Although 1 Corinthians addresses believers who have not yet advanced beyond spiritual infancy (1 Cor 3:1-3), Hebrews is distinct in addressing Jewish believers who have ceased to grow and are at risk of moving back into some form of Judaism. They are not growing spiritually and are in danger of defaulting back to their old lifestyle and religious practices, thereby denying Jesus in their daily living. God wants them to reconnect with their earlier confidence in Christ and is optimistic they will (Heb 6:9).

III. ENCOURAGING AND CHALLENGING STUCK BELIEVERS

To help us as we preach, teach, and interact with believers to challenge them to progress in their relationship with Jesus, the book of Hebrews provides a model that includes multiple facets.⁸ This paper elaborates on three of those facets: bringing a message from God, lifting up Jesus, and warning about the dangers of not growing spiritually.

A. BY BRINGING A MESSAGE FROM GOD

God has spoken through His Son and we are to listen! This is where the book of Hebrews begins, and so should we.

Hebrews starts with a reminder: God has spoken through the prophets of Israel but now “has spoken to us in His Son” (Heb 1:1-2). Toward the end of the book, readers are warned, “do not refuse Him [Jesus] who is speaking” (Heb 12:24). The emphasis from beginning to end in the book of Hebrews is on Jesus and responding rightly to Him.

⁸Other approaches used in Hebrews to encourage believers of the importance of growing spiritually include: focusing on future rest and rewards (Heb 2:1-4; 6:7, 12; 10:25), inviting believers to be Christ’s companions (Heb 1:9, 14; 3:14), and following examples of men and women of faith (Heb 13:7, 17).

The problem was that these Jewish believers had become hard of hearing. When communicating additional information about Melchizedek, the writer of Hebrews wrote, “we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing” (Heb 5:11). These non-growing believers had become less responsive to spiritual truth and, hence, missed out on additional revelation from God.

Stuck believers need to hear and respond to a “word from the Lord.”⁹ A stalled believer, in particular, needs to be confronted with the authority of what God says. They don’t need man’s opinion or theories about life, reality, and ultimate truth. They need to hear the truth of God’s Word. In a world full of opinions, it is God’s opinion that matters most. When believers are not growing, they need to be challenged by God Himself through His Word. The option always exists that a person may decide not to listen. They may decide God is wrong and reject what He says. But a word from God puts stuck believers in a place where they must decide how they will respond.

The writer of Hebrews models bringing a “word from God” by quoting the OT. In fact, no other NT book quotes the OT more than Hebrews.¹⁰ This not only makes sense in light of the Jewish believers to whom he is writing, but it also emphasizes the importance of God’s Word.

It is interesting how the writer introduces some of the OT citations. For example, “Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit *says*,” (Heb 3:7, emphasis added) was written to introduce an OT quote (Ps 95:7-11). Although the writer was quoting a 1,000-year-old passage, the passage was presented as something the Holy Spirit is *presently*

⁹ I use this and similar phrases for two reasons. First, because of the frequency of the various forms of the word “say” (*legō*) with God as the subject and the mention of God’s “voice” (Heb 3:7, 15; 4:7; 12:26) to emphasize the source of the message, God. Second, using “word” points to propositional content in contrast to a subjective impression.

¹⁰ Fourteen percent (14%) of the English words in the book of Hebrews are quoted from the OT.

saying!¹¹ The writer of Hebrews brought a current “word from the Lord” by quoting a passage of Scripture. Felix H. Cortez from the Universidad de Montemorelos makes the same observation:

Thus, implicitly or explicitly, the author of Hebrews describes God as speaking directly to the audience of the letter in the words of the Scriptures. Note that the ‘word of God’ is spoken, not written. It is a striking fact that the author of Hebrews does not use the common formula ‘as it is written.’¹²

When we accurately quote and apply a passage of God’s Word, it is something God is presently saying to the hearers. A “word from the Lord” must come from the Bible. It is not some subjective sense of what we think God said to us apart from Scripture. Therefore, we can conclude that a “word from the Lord” comes from a correct interpretation of a biblical passage that is accurately applied; otherwise, it is not a “word from the Lord.”¹³ The objective Word of God, the Bible, is the “word from God.”

There is a subjective aspect to the process in responding to God’s Word when the Holy Spirit convicts and points out truths in the Word related to our life. The Spirit of

¹¹ This precise phrase (“the Holy Spirit says”) is found only one other place in the NT. A prophet named Agabus uses this phrase as he brings a revelation from God for Paul about what will happen to Paul when he travels to Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-11). In a similar statement, the Holy Spirit testifies “saying” and “says” quoting Jer 31:33-34 in Heb 10:15-17. In Acts 28:25, Paul says “the Holy Spirit spoke rightly” and then quotes from Isaiah 6.

¹² Felix H. Cortez, “See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking’: Hearing God Preach and Obedience in the Letter to the Hebrews,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* (vol. 19, numbers 1&2, 2008) 102.

¹³ What the Bible text says is the “word from God.” Bob Wilkin rightly states, “Some people strangely think that ‘devotional’ reading of the Bible is aimed at hearing what God says to us and study of the Bible is aimed at learning facts from the Bible so we can teach others those facts. Not true. All Bible reading is Bible study. And all Bible study has as its aim becoming more like our Savior . . . The Word of God is powerful and living. It is our spiritual food. Growth comes by the Word changing our thinking, which in turn changes our actions.” From “Reading the Bible: The Key to Interpretation” in *Grace in Focus* (September-October 2009).

God uses the Word of God. A picture that helps me is of the Holy Spirit standing next to me with a yellow highlighter, periodically marking something in God's Word for me to notice and respond to. Hence, the reason I sometimes say, "Wow, I never noticed that before!" Once again, we can choose to ignore or reject God speaking to us through His Word and remain unchanged.

When I was at Dallas Theological Seminary, Professor Bill Lawrence gave us an assignment in a preaching class. He asked us to write about how to preach with power. I had no idea what he was getting at. At the time, my only recollection of "power" terminology came from charismatic churches. I remember asking him to help me (professors are so patient!). The answer: Preachers preach and teachers teach with power to the degree that they 1) accurately communicate the Bible with 2) a heart of dependence on the Holy Spirit. The degree with which we accurately preach and teach the Word of God is the degree to which the Holy Spirit can bring a "word from the Lord" to the hearers.

A local church should accurately present God's Word to people. That is something the unbelieving world cannot do. If it does, then that local church is a beacon of truth in a dead and dying world. Hebrews 4:12 is well known for its affirmation of the power of God's Word, and this is precisely what is needed for spiritually stuck believers who face critical decisions.

In our quest to be creative, interesting, relevant, and entertaining, we can get off track and decrease our emphasis on God's Word. Sometimes people walk away having enjoyed the message but with no sense they have heard from God. Therefore, I seriously consider whether my preaching and teaching bring messages from God. Stuck believers, in particular, need a "word from the Lord" to help them. It is the Word of God that the Holy Spirit uses to change lives.

Spiritual growth is an issue of the heart. When people are presented with a message from God, it is the response

of their heart that matters. Three times (Heb 3:7, 15; 4:7) the author of Hebrews quotes Ps 95:7-8 with the phrase “Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.” Notice the close connection between hearing and heart in Ps 95:7-8. Non-growing believers have a heart problem: They have hardened their hearts.

There is also a connection between hearing and obeying. Two of the three times the word “obey” occurs in Hebrews,¹⁴ it is the word for “hear” (*akouō*) with the preposition “by, through, under” (*hupō*) added to the front of the word, which results in the word “obey” (*hupakouō*). The right response to hearing is obeying. This is how it works with our children. When I ask or tell my boys to do something and they don’t respond with obedience, I ask, “Did you hear me?” To hear a “word from the Lord,” we need soft hearts that are willing to respond with faith and obedience. When we clearly present the Word of God to a non-growing believer, they have to respond. They can choose to harden their hearts and refuse what God says to them or respond in obedience, but they must decide how to respond.

The concept of speaking a message from God is mentioned in Heb 13:7, where God reminds these believers to “remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you.” These leaders are to be remembered because they “spoke the word of God to you.” Peter echoes this same truth when he says, “Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God” (1 Pet 4:11a). It is the Bible that God uses to address the hearts of people. As Heb 4:12 so powerfully says, “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and

¹⁴The Greek word for “hear” (*akouō*) is used eight times in Hebrews including Heb 3:7, 15; 4:7, which quote Ps 95:7-8 mentioned above. The English word for “obey” is found three times in Hebrews (5:9; 11:8; 13:17) in the NASB. Heb 5:9 and 11:8 use the Greek word *hupakouō* and Hebrews 13:17 uses the Greek word *peithō*, which has the meaning “to persuade, to have confidence.”

intentions of the heart.” A stuck believer must respond to God Himself when He has spoken directly to them.

B. BY LIFTING UP JESUS

Many things can be rightly focused on in our preaching, teaching, and study of God's Word. This includes God's instruction on living wisely, promises to claim, sins to repent, principles to guide our decisions, and truth to understand life from a biblical perspective. Yet in the book of Hebrews, the focus is clearly on Jesus Christ. Although that could be said about all the NT books, Hebrews makes direct comparisons between many aspects of Jesus and His ministry and the Old Covenant. Jesus is repeatedly shown to be the fulfillment of the OT practices mentioned in Hebrews. A standard outline of Hebrews rightfully emphasizes “The Superiority of the Person of Christ (Hebrews 1-4), The Superiority of the Priesthood of Christ (Hebrews 5-10), The Superiority of the Power of Christ (Hebrews 11-13)”¹⁵

Church congregations in the United States typically do not include a group of Jewish believers who are being pressured and tempted to return to the practices of Judaism. Individual Jewish believers may face this. Yet some believers are pressured to return to their original religious upbringing. Here in Utah, it is a very real issue for people who become believers by faith alone in Christ alone out of Mormonism. Friends and relatives frequently put pressure on new believers to return to the practices of and participation in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS).

In other parts of the country, one religious group or another is predominate, and believers in Jesus who step away from that particular church or group face very real religious, social, and sometimes even financial consequences. In all cultures, believers face various levels of

¹⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible*, NAS, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995) 1944.

pressure to return to their religious roots that are not centered on Jesus and the Bible.

Even for believers without a religious background, the thought of backing off from fully following Jesus and returning to friends, activities, practices, and lifestyles from their “before they found Jesus days” can be difficult to resist. Even if their situation before they believed was challenging, a certain level of comfort and familiarity can again make not living for Jesus attractive.

Hebrews is not addressing Gentile believers, but we can understand why Jewish believers hesitated to “press on to maturity” in the face of persecution (Heb 10:23-38). By simply keeping private their belief in Jesus and returning to the regular practices of Judaism, they likely would have reduced the opposition they were facing. This is analogous to politically correct America, where religious beliefs are viewed as acceptable as long as they are kept private. In many places around the world, public display of your faith in Christ can get you killed. The recipients of Hebrews had not yet faced death for their faith (Heb 12:4). In spite of the earthly danger these believers faced, God still challenged them to live for Jesus.¹⁶

As we direct stuck believers back to a path of growth, we must emphasize the superiority of Jesus over all the alternatives offered by this temporal world. Just as Hebrews illustrates how Jesus is superior to the Old Covenant, we too must illustrate how Jesus is superior to whatever else seeks to become the central focus of a person’s life. The common false gods or idols of materialism, pleasure, and power are well known. As God says in 1 John 2:16, “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.”

A number of passages specifically mention focusing on Jesus. Hebrews 3:1 says, “Therefore, holy brethren, par-

¹⁶These Jewish believers are instructed to “hold fast” to their confidence (Heb 3:6), their assurance (Heb 3:14), and their confession (Heb. 4:14 and 10:23).

takers of a heavenly calling, *consider Jesus*, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession” [italic added]. The well-known passage of Heb 12:2 says, “*fixing our eyes on Jesus*, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” [italic added].

The reminder to focus on Jesus and lift Him up should cause us to evaluate our teaching and preaching of God’s Word. Sometimes what believers need is not more religious activity, but a clearer understanding of who Jesus is and what He is like. For example, one of the adult Sunday School teachers at our church in Sandy, UT, Grace Community Bible Church, was concerned about an acquaintance we both knew who was not growing spiritually. The teacher suggested this person needed a clearer and more Biblically accurate view of Jesus. I agreed.

We can also get off track in our preaching. Mark Galli notes, “The sermon has inadvertently become a showcase of the pastor’s life and faith; less about the centrality and greatness of Jesus.”¹⁷ God can move believers spiritually as we direct their attention to Jesus.

C. BY WARNING BELIEVERS ABOUT THE DANGERS OF NOT GROWING

God is warning believers in Hebrews to watch out for certain dangers that will hinder and damage spiritual growth. As loving parents, we do the same thing with our children. We want them to avoid the pain that comes from making poor choices. I often find myself saying, “Watch out for this!” and “This is what you need to do to help your life.” Each warning comes out of love and concern for my children, even if they don’t view it that way! God expresses His love for His children through warnings and exhortations that help us grow.

¹⁷Mark Galli, “Enough of Me Already!” *Leadership* (Winter 2010), 89.

*1. By using the warnings in Hebrews
as a way to evaluate problems*

In the book of Hebrews, God mentions a number of dangers that believers must watch out for. Most NT commentators see five warnings in Hebrews (Heb 2:1-4; 3:7–4:13; 5:11–6:12; 10:19-39; 12:14-29).¹⁸ Much has been written about these warnings from a variety of perspectives. Dr. Tom Constable, Senior Professor of Bible Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary, succinctly summarizes each of the five warnings with the following words:

1. Negligence (2:1-4)
2. Unbelief (3:7-19)
3. Immaturity (5:11-6:12)
4. Willful sinning (10:19-39)
5. Unresponsiveness (12:14-29).¹⁹

The distinction of a Free Grace perspective is the recognition that the entire book of Hebrews, including the warning passages, is addressed to believers who are secure in their eternal life. God’s desire is for them to grow spiritually (i.e., “press on to maturity” [Heb 6:1]). These warnings are meant to discourage these Jewish believers from returning to the practices of Judaism and to encourage them to grow into spiritual maturity.

The warnings in Hebrews can be itemized in various ways that result in more than just five warnings. A more complete list is the nine warnings by Randall Gleason:

1. Spiritual drift (2:1)
2. Neglect (2:3)
3. Unbelief (3:12)
4. Disobedience (4:11)
5. Immaturity (5:11-6:1)

¹⁸Herbert W. Bateman, ed., *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2007), 90.

¹⁹Mark Bailey and Tom Constable, *The New Testament Explorer* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1999), 506-507.

6. Spiritual lethargy (6:12)
7. Willful sin (10:26)
8. Immorality (12:16)
9. Disregard of divine warnings (12:25).²⁰

To warn someone (*chrēmatisō* in Heb 12:25) is to make them aware of harm or danger.²¹ Gleason's nine descriptions are dangers to watch out for in advance. In Hebrews, these believers are already experiencing a number of these pitfalls (e.g. neglect, immaturity), if not many of them; hence the need for this letter.

Gleason's list gives actions and attitudes that cause believers to get off track and stagnate in their spiritual growth. Believers, by habitual behavior, often get stuck in the very places they are warned to avoid! For example, golfers are warned about not hitting their ball into a sand trap, but because of carelessness and a lack of skill, they often end up there anyway.

When examining my own spiritual life, I find it helpful to ask which of these mistakes I am most likely to make. How do I get unstuck when I fall into one of these traps? The warnings in Hebrews can serve as a spiritual checklist for believers to evaluate spiritual health. As a pastor, I can use this list to determine possible places where someone has gone off track and become stuck. This, in turn, helps me figure out what course of action will be helpful for that person.

2. By using the commands in Hebrews as a way to develop solutions

The specific commands in Hebrews provide us with useful information about helping stuck believers to get growing again. Hebrews is described as a "word of exhortation" (Heb 13:22). As it turns out, many exhortations are given by the writer of Hebrews to the readers. Once

²⁰ Herbert W. Bateman, ed., *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2007) 250.

²¹ See Colin Brown, *NIDNTT*, 3: 324-25.

again, the lists can vary in number depending on how they are counted.²² God’s love for us is evident in the commands He gives from His eternal perspective, which often challenges our limited, temporal view of life.

With these exhortations, fellow believers can avoid needless heartache and enjoy the good things God has for them in this life and beyond! My list of specific commands in the book of Hebrews:²³

1. Focus on the supreme character and position of Jesus (2:1).
2. Study and understand the faithful life Jesus lived (3:1-2).
3. Do not harden your heart to God’s word (3:7-8); “today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts”; this shows up three times (3:7-8, 15; 4:7), so it must be important!
4. Guard your heart from unbelief (3:12).
5. Encourage one another to not be deceived by sin (3:13).
6. Don’t miss out on God’s rest (4:1).
7. Be diligent in your spiritual life and witness so you will enjoy the promised future rest (4:11)
8. Publicly speak of your belief in Jesus (4:14).
9. Humbly go to Jesus for strength in times of difficulty (4:16).
10. Decide to apply yourself to growing spiritually (6:1).
11. Be diligent, not lazy, about spiritual growth (6:11-12a).
12. Imitate growing believers (6:12b).

²²J. Dwight Pentecost lists 38 exhortations in *A Faith that Endures* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1992), 24-25.

²³This list consists of 21 of the 29 Greek imperatives (eight don’t directly apply) and 13 first-person, subjective-mood verbs translated “let us.” Wallace comments: “Since there is no first person imperative, the hortatory subjunctive is used to do roughly the same task. Thus this use of the subjunctive is an exhortation in the *first person plural*.” Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 464. Eight statements of advice from the author of Hebrews are included in this list as well.

13. Approach Jesus with sincere confidence (10:22).
14. Publicly speak of future hope (10:23).
15. Actively prod other believers to join you in doing good for others (10:24).
16. Be actively involved in church (10:25).
17. Recall your early days as a new believer when you were living for the Lord (10:32).
18. Be bold in your faith, which God greatly rewards (10:35).
19. Don't deny faith in Jesus by words or actions because it will lead to judgment (10:39).
20. Trusting God is the only way to please Him (11:6b).
21. Seek God for He rewards those who seek Him (11:6c).
22. Get rid of hindrances to your spiritual life, specifically unbelief (12:1a).
23. Approach your spiritual life as a long-distance run, focused on Jesus (12:1-2).
24. Think carefully about how Jesus endured persecution to strengthen your perseverance (12:3).
25. Be strong when the Lord disciplines you as a son (12:5).
26. Strengthen yourself and other believers who are struggling (12:12).
27. Remove obstacles to prevent spiritual harm (12:13).
28. Pursue peace and holiness in relationships (12:14).
29. Pay attention to what Jesus says (12:25).
30. Show gratitude to the Lord by serving Him (12:28).
31. Continue to love other believers (13:1).
32. Actively show hospitality (13:2).
33. Remember believers who are in prison for their faith (13:3).
34. Honor marriage with purity (13:4).
35. Be content with what you have (13:5).
36. Remember and honor leaders who teach the Word of God (13:7).
37. Hold to grace, not to strange teachings contrary to grace (13:9).

38. Endure the disapproval of people as you follow Jesus (13:13).
39. Praise God even in the midst of opposition (13:15).
40. Sacrificially do good for others (13:16).
41. Trust and follow your spiritual leaders (13:17).
42. Respond rightly to the message of Hebrews (13:22).

These exhortations provide helpful instructions for individual believers to resume growing. These commands are like tools in a toolbox, available to use in my own life and in the lives of others to help us grow. In other words, they are resources that I draw on to encourage spiritual growth.

3. Three examples of how sharing the warnings and exhortations of Hebrews can be helpful

Example 1: Recently, I met with a man who is a believer, but his church involvement had been minimal and sporadic. He readily admitted that he had been drifting spiritually (warning No. 1) and had neglected (warning No. 2) his spiritual life. I challenged him to consider the possibility that he was wasting his life by spending it on leisure and entertainment and making no impact for eternity. In this case, he was not defensive, but rather, he was open to suggestions. We discussed ways he could be more diligent (No. 7) in his spiritual life and the need for him to apply himself (No. 10) and grow spiritually. As we explored ways he could serve the Lord (No. 30), we agreed that he and his wife would be a good fit for hospitality (No. 32) in our connecting ministry. This is an excellent example of how the exhortations given in Hebrews can take a variety of forms.

Example 2: This example involves an immature woman believer who was struggling with life and her faith. She was dealing with disappointment and bitterness (Heb 12:15). As a result, she pulled away from church and away from some of her Christian friends. I encouraged her that we are here to help (No. 26) and that this is a

time when she needs Jesus' help (No. 9) and the support of others (No. 16). However, I did not get a chance to tell her that this is a time when she needs to publicly speak of her belief in Jesus (No. 8). This is a woman who very much needs the rest of us to provide encouragement and support (No. 26 and others). It remains to be seen how her situation will play out.

Example 3: This example comes from our New2Grace class, which provides orientation for people who are new to our church. When people first attend a worship service at Grace Community Bible Church, they are encouraged to enroll in the senior pastor's New2Grace class. In the first session of this two-part class, Pastor Dan Hornok goes over the history and beliefs of our church. In the second session, he talks about how Grace can support a person to grow spiritually. New2Grace is an opportunity to spell out the expectations we as a church have for people who attend Grace. We expect them to: attend the worship service, participate in one of the three adult Sunday School classes, and get involved in a ministry. Laying these expectations out has been extremely helpful in encouraging people to participate in the community of Grace Community Bible Church. And those newcomers who are spiritually stalled are helped by being directly invited and challenged to be fully involved in a Bible believing church (No. 16).

IV. CONCLUSION

We can view the content of Hebrews as God's approach to getting believers to see the importance of growing spiritually. In the book of Hebrews, we see how God approaches spiritually "stuck" believers to encourage them on to maturity before they make significant poor choices with eternal consequences. The focus in Hebrews is getting believers growing, not to test whether or not they have eternal life.

Hebrews provides many ways we can challenge stalled believers to grow, but three of the more important are: bringing a message from God, lifting up Jesus, and warning believers about the dangers of not growing.

In local church ministry, Biblical instruction must seek to accurately teach the Bible from a Free Grace perspective and bring a “word from God.” We should lift up Jesus and keep our focus on Him in our conversations. As we build relationships with other believers in a local church, we can help each other to heed the warnings and follow the commands of Hebrews. When people get involved in serving Jesus inside or outside the walls of our local church they begin investing their lives in eternity rather than spending their lives on themselves. In Hebrews, believers are invited to live their lives in such a way that when the Lord Jesus returns they will enjoy the future rest and rewards that He has for those who diligently follow Him.