

Jesus is a **BETTER SHEPHERD**

(Hebrews 13:1-19)

After a mini-series or two, we return to our final instalment in the book of the Bible called Hebrews . . . after quite a few weeks break, we need a quick recap of the Book.

We began our series pointing out that Hebrews is a New Testament letter written to Christians who were counting the cost of following Jesus.

New on the world scene, these "Christians", followers of Christ Jesus, were largely *misunderstood* and *mocked* esp. by Gentiles, who exalted power & wisdom, looking down their noses at 'dummies' worshipping a crucified saviour-king (like this ancient graffiti ridiculing "Alexamenos worships his god", putting a donkey head on Jesus).

This perception *really* affected Christians' livelihood, their upward mobility in the workplace

Hebrews was *especially* relevant to Christians of a *Hebrew* ethnicity, Jews who came to realise that Jesus actually IS the long-awaited Messiah, the Saviour-King, but these Hebrew Christians were largely disowned from Jewish family for embracing Jesus, while family rejected Him, often cutting them off from traditions & festivals, even their inheritance.

Family pressures, **Financial** pressures, **Faith** pressures . . . They were thinking,
Did we get it right about Jesus? Is He the One/Worth it? Because this is hard going?

So the author of the book of Hebrews encourages struggling believers to press on,

JESUS IS BETTER..He is the fulfilment of everything promise by God!

So stick with Jesus, because there's *No Turning Back*.

Encouragement for believers – then & NOW – does that struggle sound like our day? Our increasingly anti-Christian age, we're ridiculed in our *workplace* (some even sacked by their company) for expressing biblical views about same-sex marriage . . . not getting a medical license or placement because you don't want to abort babies or prescribe pills that do...being ridiculed within your *family* as a Christian "fundamentalist/extremist", maybe disowned if you were raised in a different faith . . . or no faith at all.

I was raised an atheist/agnostic home, and while not disowned, I could never forget my Dad's words to me about coming to Christ & going to Bible College, hand on my shoulder

"Son, what a WASTE of potential!"

We need to be encouraged to stick with Jesus, because there is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved. Jesus is the centre of everything.

We'll return to this idea after we introduce chapter 13, the end of the letter. [Recap done]

● **Chapter 13**

When those of us who are 'city slickers' think of the word "sheep", I reckon our imagination goes into soft focus, as we think of cute & cuddly, fluffy little lambs, white as snow. But a sheep herder ('shepherd') knows what sheep are really like!

John Stott, a famous British pastor, had a neighbour who was a sheep herder, who told Stott that *real* sheep are filthy & stinky, frequently infested with ticks & lice (plural of louse, our word "lousy"). And finally, he said, sheep are the opposite of clever!

After hearing this, Pastor Stott comments,

"I hesitate to describe the people of God as dirty, lousy and stupid! But . . ."

That's how we are often portrayed in Scripture: as "sheep"!

In the classic book , *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Philip Keller describes the helplessness of a sheep on its own, especially one that's "cast" rolled onto its back:

"It paws frantically to no avail. [It cannot turn itself upright] Gases build up in the [stomach] and expand to cut off blood flow to the legs. If the weather is very hot a cast sheep can die in a few hours. If it is cool, it may survive a few days in this position, if wolves don't come first."

You think Australian sheep more "clever"?

We don't need *dingoes* to take the places of wolves here! True story (friends of Ben S.): In the paddocks of Pittsworth, by Toowoomba, a domestic dog became famous as a serial sheep-killer . . . what *breed* of dog? A tiny Pomeranian named Pom-Pom!

On their own, sheep are helpless, they can't even 'right themselves', never mind find their way home, like a dog or cat . . . or **like us**, 'cast' on our back, struggling amidst our circumstances, struggling in our own sins . . . we cannot right ourselves, restore our soul.

Just as literal sheep need shepherds to flourish,

We need a Shepherd to right us, guide us, feed us & restore us, when we go wayward.

And we have one!

*"our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the **sheep**" (Hebrews 13:20)*

And it's no accident the final quality of Jesus listed in Hebrews is *the Great Shepherd*, since that's precisely what *struggling*, maybe *wandering* Christians need.

Jesus is a Better SHEPHERD.

It's a diverse chapter, hard to outline!, but we could view its main idea like this:

A Flourishing Flock (of Faith) comes only from Christ-like Shepherding

You see, sheep may *naturally* be dirty & dumb, but when they have a **good shepherd** – they're made clean & healthy, bright & beautiful, even praise-worthy and powerful!

It's no typical 'city-slicker' poetry, but Solomon *praises* the sheep-like teeth & hair of his bride! Teeth, bright white. Hair, shiny & flowing like a flock running downhill (Songs 4:1-2)

And when sheep are **united** by their shepherd, they're a force to be reckoned with – they can stop trucks on motorway!, and as *holy* sheep, we can stop Satan in his tracks, we can stop sin gaining a foothold here But this only happens when Jesus is at the centre – not only of this chapter, but the centre of our lives, our hearts.

When we get Jesus right, and marvel at His *gracious-tenacious* shepherding love, then, and only then, can we lovingly shepherd *one another* – a 'flock' to be reckoned with, as we beautifully model to one another and hold out to the world, God's grace in Christ.

We see the 'overflow from the centre', the ripple effect outward, in our Outline

➤ ***Christ as the Centre: our Great Shepherd (13:8-16)***

➤ ***Leading like Christ: His under-shepherds (13:7, 17-19)***

➤ ***Loving Like Christ: shepherding One Another (13:1-6)***

Verses 8-16 are 'enclosed' by v.7 & v. 17, where see a focus on church 'leaders':

Heb. 13:7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.

Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

Heb. 13:17 Obey your leaders & submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls....

Then the widest 'ripple effect' of our Great Shepherd is shepherding one another.

Recall, the writer of Hebrews refers to his letter as a "*brief word of exhortation*" (13:23) – it's a sermon, and chapter 12 ends with a 'launch pad' towards 'application':

"Therefore, let us be GRATEFUL for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and so let us OFFER to God acceptable worship, in reverence and awe" (12:28)

Chapter 13 is that application, what that 'acceptable worship' *looks like*, where he tries to pack in nearly everything he can! (packs heaps in, thinks his sermon's brief? I can't relate!)

CHRIST AS THE CENTRE: OUR GREAT SHEPHERD (13:8-16)

This central section begins with a glorious and often quoted declaration about Jesus, v.8:

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

So well known, but what's the point, the relevance to *struggling* Christians?

First, what this verse does not mean:

- It does not mean that Jesus is always the same in *every* way. He was born; He grew. And hear how the Gospel of John begins, *"In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . and Word became flesh and dwelt among us!"*

At a point in history, Jesus – God – who had **no** body/flesh, became a man . . . so that He could sympathise with us, and fulfil all righteousness so that He could die in our place, as a *sinless man* for *sinful men* – so that we could be forgiven & enter God's family.

Jesus has *always* been God, but *not* always the God-man.

So what does verse 8 mean?:

It's about why no one can rival Jesus.

Most connections tie back to chapter 1, so let's find the thread of Jesus "**sameness**", *yesterday, today and forever*:

- **"YESTERDAY" / The Past:** (Hebrews 1:10, 2-3)
*"of the Son, He says:
 'You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning,
 and the heavens are the work of your hands' . . .
 God has spoken to us by His Son, through whom He created the world . . .
 After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."*
- **"TODAY" / The Present** (Hebrews 1:3)
*"He **upholds** the universe by the word of His **power**"*
- **"FOREVER" / The Future** (Hebrews 1:8, 11-12)
*...of the Son He says:
 "Your THRONE, O God, is **forever and ever** . . .
 The earth and heavens will perish, but You remain . . .
You are the same, and Your years will have no end."*

See the common thread?

Jesus is **reigning** and His rule is forever, like Himself.

. . . Who is Jesus? . . .

The powerful Creator of the world, who sustains it by His powerful word!

Yes, He humbled Himself in taking on flesh to die for our sins, but He's been *restored, exalted* to His proper position of authority:
magisterial rule in Heaven!

Jesus is still on the throne, still in control!

In other words . . . Christian, although your circumstances are TOUGH, ***nothing has changed*** about Jesus' powerful rule and His good news!

(skimming through Hebrews like a 'table of contents'):

He's still the Better *Message* (of God's undeserved grace),

He's still the Better *Deliverer* (not just from slavery, but from sin)

He's still the Better *Rest* (giving access to heavenly rest in God's promised land),

He's still the Better *Priestly* Encourager (who sympathises with our suffering)

the Better *Advocate*, who justly pleads our case before the Father.

the Better *Sacrifice*, who once for all pays for all our sin,

removing our shame, removing our guilt, clearing our conscience!

He still brings a Better *Community* . . . as our Great Shepherd, chapter 13.

So press on in Him – don't turn back because there is no other Saviour, no one who accomplishes what Jesus does.

Verses 9-10 say the same thing in reverse:

Do NOT be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be

strengthened by GRACE, NOT by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.

We have an altar from which those who serve the tent/tabernacle have no right to eat.

The last of our mental 'heavy lifting', these verses are a summary way of saying what the previous chapters explained:

Don't turn back to the Old Covenant!

Kosher laws about "clean foods" cannot make anyone clean.

The old system of Jewish temple sacrifices, with its **blood** of **bulls & goats**, cannot take away sins, make anyone righteous! (Neither can pagan sacrifices)

The OT 'altar' had no **power** in itself; it was a **pointer** to Jesus:

the fulfilment of every promise, the substance of every "shadow".

So, our "altar" is **Christ crucified**, His precious blood shed for us.

Just as the body of the atoning goat was brought outside the city gate on the OT Day of Atonement (that's what v. 11 refers to), likewise, verse 12:

So, Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.

Jesus did this willingly, offering Himself for us – the undeserving. That's grace.

We are '*strengthened by grace*', by reminding ourselves of God's goodness in Jesus.

The Gospel is not just the diving board – it's the pool!

And showing us that Jesus is still on the throne, ruling, the writer of Hebrews is saying,
Trust Him! The sovereign Son has good reasons for the suffering He allows.

And that is no 'token' statement! Jesus knows suffering. In Jesus' own words,

The Good Shepherd lays down His life for His sheep (John 10:11)

Please stop and think of how *awesome* is the Integrity of our Great Shepherd:

Jesus asks us to do **nothing** He Himself has not already done!

Jesus is a Better Shepherd, leading sheep by *Example*, not by whipping a chariot horse.

Today, we have 'working dogs' that herd sheep by driving them into paddocks with fear. But in biblical days, the shepherd was with his sheep, not just guarding them, but leading the way. Jesus said,

*"I am the Good Shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me —
My sheep hear My voice . . . and they follow Me."*

Jesus **led** the way, by example.

To be "outside the gate" or "camp" was to leave the "safe place" of protective walls. And Jesus left it, for us.

He asks us to do *nothing* He has not already done!

As an illustration, of anticipating our potential protest, we could describe it like this:

At the end of time, billions of people were scattered on a great plain before God's throne.

Groups were forming and the talking was heated . . .

"How can God judge us?!" snapped a brunette, jerking back her sleeve to reveal the tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp.

A black man lowered his collar, "What about this?!" he demanded, showing a rope burn: "Lynched because of the colour of my skin!"

Far across the plain were many of such groups, each protesting to God for their suffering in this world. How privileged God was to live in Heaven. What does God know about suffering. "After all, God leads a pretty sheltered life," they said.

So each group sent out a representative, victims from Hiroshima, a Siberian slave camp, a leper colony, an untouchable from India.

After consulting, they "presented their case":

Before God would be qualified to judge us, He would have to endure what we did

He should be sentenced to live on earth as a man!

But, they insisted certain "safeguards" must be in place so God could not escape suffering . . . Let Him be born a persecuted minority – a Jew. Let the legitimacy of His birth be questioned.

Let Him champion a cause so just but so radical, that He's mocked and hated by the establishment. Let Him be betrayed by His dearest friends, arrested on false charges, tried before a prejudiced jury, and convicted by a cowardly judge. Let Him be abandoned, tortured, and let Him die a painful, humiliating death with common thieves.

As they announced the sentence, there was a long silence. . . When they looked at Him, suddenly, they all knew. . . God had already served His sentence.

And only Jesus was **sinless** in serving His sentence!

Jesus is a Better Shepherd, with perfect integrity, who asks us to do *nothing* He's not done!

FIX THAT TO YOUR MIND, as you hear the 'challenge' of verse 13:

Therefore **let us go** to Him outside the camp and **bear the reproach He endured!**

His example is to motivate us, serving not in fear but *gratitude!* In praise of what He's done:

*"Through Jesus let us continually offer a **sacrifice** of praise to God,*

The fruit of LIPS that praise his name,

Not neglecting DEEDS of kindness and generosity,

*for God is pleased with such **sacrifices**" (Hebrews 13:15-16)*

See the 'ripple effect' spreading out, as Jesus' integrity leads to ours!

See the integrity of lips and lives in sacrificial service, grounded in praise/gratitude.

Our 2nd & 3rd points will unpack this Christ-like integrity in leading & loving one another.

Wrapping up our first point, speaking of lips that praise his name . . .

I listened to a kids song this week that perfectly sums up the message of the book of Hebrews, and the centre of chapter 13: *"Nothing Better than Jesus!"*

Here's 30 seconds. Listen & rejoice!

*Planets and oceans, towering trees
Jesus is greater than all of these!
Armies and airplanes, princes and kings,
Jesus is stronger than everything!
Presents and birthdays, JESUS IS BETTER!
Forever and always, JESUS IS BETTER!
Better than anything that you can imagine
Jesus is better than all!¹*

The Gospel is not just the diving board – it's the pool! Be strengthened by **Grace**.

Jesus' *gracious-tenacious* shepherding love pursues even 1 sheep who's wandered.

Have you felt the loving pursuit of Jesus? Received the salvation He graciously offers?

Oh friend, will you turn from yourself and your sin, and trust in Him today?

Receive him as your Saviour, bow to Him as Lord. Take His caring, loving leadership over your life, and the Great Shepherd will give you rest for your soul.

When we are centred on Jesus, everything else can fall into place, the outward ripple effect . . . *leading like Christ and loving like Christ.*

These final 2 points are more simple, more practical.

In both, we are simply to follow Jesus' lead!

LEADING LIKE CHRIST: HIS UNDER-SHEPHERDS (13:7, 17-19)

Some people have been used & abused by leadership, even church leadership.

They are traumatised and often apprehensive about leaders of any sort, and rightly so.

Maybe that's you?!

All people, but *especially* those traumatised by over-bearing leadership, need to know that to lead *like Christ* is to lead in 'strengthening by grace.'

It is the GRACE Jesus offers that makes His under-shepherds 'palatable', safe to obey & follow because these leaders view themselves as *underserving* spiritual beggars falling short of God's glory, jars of clay, needing a constant supply of God's grace to serve well.

This is why Paul writes, *"Follow me as I follow Christ"* . . . not, *"Follow me in everything!"*

Pastor Warren Wiersbe shares,

After I announced my resignation from a church I had been pastoring for several years, one of the members said to me, "I don't see how I'm going to make it without you! I depend so much on you!"

My reply shocked him. "Then the sooner I leave, the sooner you can start depending on the Lord.. Build your life on Jesus Christ. He never changes."

Amen.

¹ "Nothing Better than Jesus" from the album *To Be Like Jesus*, by Sovereign Grace Kids.

The integrity that we see in Jesus, that is to spread out as shown in vv. 15-16, MUST be how His under-shepherds lead. Hebrews 13:7,

*Remember your **leaders**, those who have **SPOKEN God's word** to you.
Consider the **OUTCOME OF THEIR LIVES**, and imitate their faith.*

Lips & lives, word & deed. The fruit of leaders' lives needs to be generally worth imitating.

The word "**pastor**" literally means "**shepherd**".

But *all* church "leaders" – paid pastors, lay elders, deacons – are called to lead like Jesus.

Way back, an OT priest named Ezra, wrote about integrity of lips & life in leadership...

Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach it.

I find this verse so satisfying but challenging.

Satisfying, because leading *by example* is better than leading by *whipping*,
and leading by *integrity* is far better than leading by *hypocrisy*.

Leadership of "*do what I say, not what I do*" is precisely the Pharisee-approach to leadership that Jesus sharply rebuked. (See Matthew 23:1-3)

So the satisfying principle is also challenging to me as a leader, because it is *walk* not just talk!

And the leaders in the church written to have sacrificed; some are in prison for speaking God's word about Jesus; some were close to being martyred. And that's . . . challenging!

But God's timing is so good in shaping us by His Spirit.

You see . . . a bit of personal, genuine confession . . .

I find ministry satisfying-but-challenging.

Challenging because of my own sin; challenging because of 'sin within' the church, plenty of counselling needed here.

This leads to my confession – *sometimes* I get frazzled & frustrated by loving, legitimate requests from church members to assist with problems of friends/family outside the church . . . even non-Christians. "Whoa! *Really* ugly sin! Uhh-uhh!"

Now, a pastor is called to prioritise 'his flock'; those 'in the paddock', so to speak.

But Jesus does not let me sit here comfortably!

He went after 1 wandering sheep!

(You might protest – like me! – 'But they left HIS paddock!')

You're right, but we've seen this chapter charges me (and actually all of us),

"let us go to Jesus outside the camp and bear the reproach He endured."

Not simply being unashamed of Jesus, but leaving my comfort zone, *for Him, like Him!*

And verse 2 commands me to love/show hospitality to "strangers."

God's timing is just so . . . perfect!

You see, I've been studying this passage the past two weeks.

And the past two weeks I've had more than usual of such requests from members.

Reading this chapter, focusing on Jesus, seeing deep & real needs "outside the camp", how could I say no?!

Trying to follow Jesus gladly this way has been personally rewarding, and I pray, fruitful. It's not easy following Jesus! But it is rewarding!
God's plan is so good, but I so need a constant supply of His grace.

So, I'll sum up this section with 2 Requests: one *from* you, and one *of* you . . .

1. The Primary callings of a church leader, v.7, are speaking God's word and living it.

I've talked about the need for leaders to *live* God's word with integrity. Now . . .
It is faithful teaching of God's word that keeps the **flock's eyes fixated on Jesus**
(that's the bridge from v. 7 to v. 8: Jesus is the same, still ruling powerfully)
And it's faithful teaching about Jesus that *prevents* the outcome warned of in vv. 9-10
(strange teachings, food laws of no benefit, false Gospel stopping access to God)

So please **PRAY** for us leaders! We need it just as the author requests for himself:
v.18 *"Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience,
desiring to act honourably in all things."*

If you are still curious about Shepherd/Elder qualifications, I did a sermon on that last year². Here's my 'summary' about an Elder's calling, competence & character:

- Calling: *Cut them, and they bleed the gospel!*
- Competence: *Hear them, and Christ's glory becomes clear!*
- Character: *Examine them, though sinners, they stand!*

God's timing is great, as usual,
because today we install Danny Hindle as an elder, a man who is just that!

2. Request #2: If you've known us for 6 to 12 months, become a member of GBC.

Verse 17 says,

*"Obey your **leaders** and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.*

Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."

You are not called to submit to *every* Christian leader in the world (you don't "submit" to John Piper, for example . . . fairly impossible, practically speaking. He's overseas).
Nor are the leaders of GBC called to "give an account" for *every* Christian in Brisbane, not even visitors or fly-in/fly-out regular attenders . . . but to the members of GBC.

Here's a question: if you've not joined a church, if you're **not** a member of a church...
How can you obey or submit to the leadership? *What does that look like?*

If you've been here a year, and you think our leadership style is over-bearing, "lording it over" . . . please come and talk to us about it! We know we have weaknesses, but as well, we may have blinds spots – because we do not "see" ourselves as over-bearing.

If you don't see us as over-bearing, become a member! To say,

"I give you the right to speaking into my life and hold me to account in Christ.

Protect me from spiritual shipwreck. This will help me, & help you to be joyful in helping me."

² A sermon called "Good Shepherds"

If you've been here a while, but are not confident you can submit to the leadership, even after talking with us . . . *please* find a church with leaders you can submit to, be accountable to. That's not our mandate, but the mandate of verse 17.

Finally . . .

LOVING LIKE CHRIST: SHEPHERDING ONE ANOTHER (13:1-6)

Love is not content with only words. It expresses its reality in compassionate deeds. In loving like Christ, these verses answer the Question,
What does shepherding 'one another' look like?

First . . . what shepherding one another should NOT look like:

{**CLIP** – "**Preacher Beeper**", summoning the preacher to do *all* the ministry.

Doesn't work, does it!? Ephesians 4 says church leaders equip members for ministry}

Every command in Heb 13:1-6 is given to the whole church, not just leaders! This is the 'furthest reaching' ripple of shepherding, because it impacts *everyone*.

Verses 1-6 say, not only "I am responsible **to** you"

But "I am responsible **for** you"

That's a **beautiful** thing when done in Christ-like love of mutual shepherding!

It's an 'echo' from Hebrews 3:13 and 10:25,

"encourage one another daily" (*mutual shepherding*)

Because,

"In the body, if one member suffers, every member suffers with it." (1 Cor 12:25-26)

I covered 13:1-4 in detail in an earlier sermon, "*Jesus Brings a Better Community*" (Heb 10:19-25 and 13:1-4). For now, I'll just show a quick 'Table of Contents' of what Loving like Jesus *looks like* in His Church:

- Familial Love towards one another (v.1)
- Hospitality shared with strangers (v.2)
- Sympathy shown to prisoners (v.3)
- Purity in our marriages (v.4)
- Contentment with our money (v.5, which leads to *sharing* what you have, vv.2 & 16)

In that sermon, I did not spend time on verse 5,

- Contentment with our money

So I'll comment on that now.

One of the biggest things inhibiting radical Christian love in the West, is *contentment* – rather lack of it! Our hearts are rather constantly distracted by the *pursuit of more stuff*. *'I'd love to help/serve that brother, but I've got more work to do, so I can get more stuff.'*

Verses 5-6,

*Keep your life free from **love of money**, and be content with what you have, for He has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my Helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"

God's got our back! We have a Great Shepherd who will never leave us!

I really like how C.S. Lewis spoke about financial generosity towards others (especially the church and individuals in need in church, but also beyond the church to the world)

I do not believe one can settle 'how much' we ought to give.

I am afraid the only safe 'rule' is to give more than we can 'spare'.

In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, is up to the common standard, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditures excludes them.³

'Stuff' will disappear. Lives are eternal, lasting.

I recently reviewed my church offering; now it's time to review my giving to missionaries. Quite possibly it's time for you to do the same?...re. church & our missionaries primarily, but also your local community, charities that pursue God-honouring deeds of mercy?

'Stuff' will disappear. Lives are eternal, lasting.

So they author reminds us in 13:14,

*"Here we have **no lasting city**, but we seek the City that is to come." [Heavenly Jerusalem, 12:22]*

We are going to leave our 'stuff' behind . . .

Someone once observed in crèche once, an unnamed little boy sitting on the floor with a red rubber ball under each arm and three yellow Nerf balls clenched between his pudgy legs. He was trying to 'keep' all of them from the other crèche kids.

Like a hyena hunched over the last scraps of a carcass, this snarling little canine was not in the mood for sharing! The other kids circled like vultures, looking for a way to jump in and snatch a ball without being bitten!

But that little boy was not having any fun. And he seemed to make all the other kids 'throw a pity-party' as well. His selfishness was like a black hole that sucked all of the joy out of the crèche!

And when church was over, what happened when his parents came to pick him up? He had to leave all the balls behind anyway!

Let's lay up treasure in Heaven, and use God-given resources for His glory & mutual good!

For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

As the author refocuses our gaze toward heavenly Mt. Zion, our unshakable kingdom and inheritance . . . I close with an excerpt from a devotional by Paul Tripp.⁴

Today you have hope, not because people 'like' you or because situations are easy, but because God has placed His unshakable love on you.

Looking to the fallen world to give you hope to continue just doesn't work very well.

Think about the address where you live:

You live with fallen people who inevitably disappoint you in some way.

You live in a broken world where corruption and injustice are commonplace.

You face temptation somehow, some way every day.

Your physical body is growing older and can be infected with disease . . .

³ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Macmillan, 1952)

⁴ *New Morning Mercies* by Paul Tripp (15 November)

*Satan prowls, doing his evil work.
War and strife pit nation against nation.
Partiality and prejudice divide us*

*It is so good to know that you do not have to frantically look for sturdy hope **horizontally**, where it just can't be found.*

*No, you are freed from this search because **powerful grace** has connected you to hope!
You see, hope is not a situation, a location, a feeling.
Hope is a person, and His name is Jesus.*

*He died so that you can know life, real life.
He is present with you so that you are guaranteed to have everything you need.
He forgives you of all your sins and empowers you to do much better . . .
He never mocks your weaknesses or throws your sin in your face.
He never gets tired of you or gives up on his relationship with you.
He doesn't ask you to earn what you can never deserve, and
He never makes you feel guilty for needing his good gifts*

*Jesus is your hope as you live in a world where hope is a precious and rare commodity.
And remember, you are connected to him forever.
This means there will be a day when you won't have to hope anymore, because the paradise you have hoped for will be the eternal reality in which you live.*

Jesus is a Better Shepherd – our Great Shepherd – leading us there, strengthening us by grace along the way, and Himself being the Way.

Let's **Lead** like Him & **Love** like Him, as we 'shepherd one another' on our journey together!

– Discussion Questions on the next page –

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Jesus is a Better Shepherd

(Hebrews 13)

A Flourishing Flock of Faith comes only from Christ-like Shepherding

Christ as the Centre: our Great Shepherd (13:8-16)

- 1] What *did* you think of sheep, and what *do* you think of them now?
What are some ways sheep really need a shepherd to flourish?
- 2] How does the symbolism of shepherd and sheep describe us?
- 3] What does v. 8 mean – & not mean – in Jesus being "*the same yesterday, today, forever?*"
How is this meaning meant to encourage a Christian struggling in their circumstances?
- 4] Jesus *leads the way* in suffering (vv.12-13). *He asks us to do nothing He has not done Himself!!*
How does the integrity of Jesus' shepherding **impact you?**

Leading like Christ: His under-shepherds (13:7, 17-19)

- 5] What 2 things does verse 7 identify as essential to a church 'leader'? Why?
- 6] What leader qualities are *worth* 'imitating'? (v.7) What qualities in them *are you* imitating?
- 7] From v.18, how do you *pray* for your leaders? How can you pray for **Danny**, as a new elder?
- 8] From v.17, how are you *obeying/submitting* to your leaders, making their soul-care a joy?
Are you a church member? If not, are you now keen to become a member? Why/why not?
Do you need to have a discussion with the leaders first? Will you set up an appointment?
- 9] How is v.17 counter-cultural with today's millennials? How should *'leading like Jesus'* offset concerns?
[Can there be a "gospel" *without* authority & submission – Jesus as Shepherd & His church as sheep?]

Loving like Christ: shepherding One Another (13:1-6)

- 10] How should Jesus' integrity impact the way you **encourage others:**
. . . Christians who are struggling? . . . non-Christians (in considering Christ)?
- 11] What is the greatest *joy* for you to live out in vv. 1-6? (what does this say about your *gifting*?)
- 12] What causes the greatest *discomfort* to you from vv. 1-6? (what is your answer identifying as *sin*?)
- 13] Why are many *in love* with money? (v.5) What did we learn from the little boy in crèche?
- 14] How are you related to money? Does money *serve* you or *rule* you? Answer that by answering this:
'How is my money serving the advancement God's kingdom?'

If Time . . .

- 15] In view of 12:28 & 13:15-16, and the phrase The Gospel is not just the *diving board* – it's the *pool!*, how does Dietrich Bonhoeffer's sentence from 'Letters and Papers from Prison' help unpack this?
*"In normal life we hardly realize how much **more we receive** than we give; life cannot be rich without such gratitude."*
- 16] Discuss what you can specifically *learn & apply* from this comment by John Stott about Jesus' incarnational example of being with His sheep in meaningful ways, with meaningful boundaries?
Jesus [delved] deeply into our humanness. He never stayed aloof from the people He might have been expected to avoid. He befriended outcasts and untouchables. It was the total identification of love ...
Yet, when He identified with us, He did not surrender His own identity.
For in becoming one of us, He remained Himself.
He became human, but without ceasing to be God.
Now He sends us into the world, as the Father sent Him into the world.

In other words, our mission is to be modelled on His:
It demands identification without loss of identity.
It means entering other people's worlds, as He entered ours,
without compromising our Christian convictions, values or standards.⁵

⁵ John Stott, *Authentic Mission*.