**Spiritual Laser Surgery: Fixing Our Focus on Jesus—Hebrews 1-3**

**The Big Idea:** To Persevere through Trials and Temptations, We Need Spiritual Laser Surgery that Corrects Our Focus, Fortifies Our Faith, and Connects Our Family

**The Big Picture: Mr. Frodo and Sam—“What Are We Holding Onto?”**

 There’s a powerful scene at the end of *The Two Towers*—the second movie in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Mr. Frodo is exhausted by all the suffering around him and tempted by the power of evil. He’s reaching up to surrender the ring of power, *and his soul*, to this evil flying creature.

 At that split second, his friend, Sam, tackles Frodo, preventing him from giving in and giving up. They tumble down a cliff and Frodo ends up on top of Sam. Knife in hand, a crazed Frodo is ready to kill Sam. Sam cries out, “It’s me. It’s your Sam. Don’t you know your Sam?”

 Frodo snaps out of the spell, horrified, and drops his sword. Then he speaks words of despair. “I just can’t do this, Sam. I can’t go on.” Sam replies with a stirring example of encouragement.

“I know. It’s all wrong. By rights we shouldn’t even be here. But we are. It’s like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo; the ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger, they were. And sometimes you didn’t want to know the end... because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was, when so much bad had happened? But in the end, it’s only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines, it will shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stayed with you, that meant something, even if you were too small to understand why. But I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand. I know now. Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back, only they didn’t. They kept going. Because they were holding on to something.”

Frodo responds, *“What are we holding on to, Sam?”*

 The recipients of the letter that we call Hebrews were a lot like Frodo. Exhausted by their trials and tempted to sin, they were ready to give up and give in. As they’re reaching up to surrender, the author of Hebrews, like Sam, tackles them with these words from Hebrews 10:32-36, 39.

“Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, *because you knew* that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. *So do not throw away your confidence*; it will be richly rewarded. You need to *persevere* so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised… We are not of those who *shrink back* and are destroyed, but of those who *believe* and are saved.”

 When these believers first committed their lives to Christ, their first love was so strong that they followed Jesus anywhere. They handled trials and temptations by clinging to Christ because they trusted Him as their Savior, Sovereign, and Shepherd. But now they’re tempted to throw away their confidence. Their trust is wavering. Like Frodo, everything inside screams at them to shrink back. To say, *“I just can’t do this, I can’t go on. Following Christ is too hard.”*

 Let’s be honest, every one of us has had to battle similar temptations. Life is hard. Each Tuesday when I read our church prayer list, I’m reminded how hard life is. We’re facing financial crises, job issues, and serious health problems. We’re wrestling with emotional struggles and deep losses that break our hearts. We and the people we love are battling sins that threaten to control and consume us and them. We’re dealing with relationship problems that seem to sap every ounce of energy and each speck of joy.

 However, *as bad as our trials are, the worst trial is our trial of faith*—the temptation to give up on Christ and to give in to sin. Please hear that again. *As bad as our trials are, the worst trial is our trial of faith*. Trials bring us to a *faith point*. Do we cling to Christ, or do we fling away our trust in Christ? Do we turn toward and run to Christ like we did when we first committed our lives to Christ, or do we lose confidence in Christ as our faith shrinks and our hope shrivels?

 When Frodo was tempted to give in and give up, he asked Sam, “What are we holding on to?” Today, in Hebrews 1-3, we’ll see God’s answer to that question. Even more importantly, we’ll see God’s answer to the question, *“Who is holding on to us?”*

**I. Correcting Our Focus: Fixed on Christ or Fixed on Our Crisis?—Hebrews 3:1; 12:1-3**

 We find the answer in Hebrews 3:1. “Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, *fix your thoughts on Jesus*, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.”

**A. Correcting Where We Fix Our Focus: Hebrews 3:1**

 I can summarize the answer in one word: *Jesus*. When life is knocking you down, when your whole world is falling apart, fix your thoughts on *Jesus*. The Greek word for *fix* is a compound word made up of the word for *mind* and for *down*. In the midst of our trials and temptations we’re to put our mind down on Christ, to nail our thinking on Jesus, to superglue our thoughts to our Savior.

 For some, when there’s little money in the bank, our most cherished relationship is crumbling, and life’s losses are mounting, talk of focusing on Jesus seems “too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good.” Others, when life is caving down around them, might think, “Look, I know I needed to trust Jesus to be saved, but now that I’m a Christian I have to pull myself up by my bootstraps. What good would it do me to fix my thoughts on Jesus? Instead of fixing my thoughts on Jesus, *I need to fix my problems*!”

The author of Hebrews is not saying that we deny our problems or refuse to address them. He *is* saying that *focusing on Christ brings our trials and temptations into focus*.

 A friend of mine likes to say, “*When life stinks, our perspective shrinks*.” Isn’t that true in our lives? Some horrible situation enters our life and we’re *consumed* by it—everything looks only dark, dank, and hopeless. We’re blinded to our Savior’s power and love. Or, we surrender to our besetting sin, yet again, and we think only of our sin and forget about Christ’s amazing grace. When life stinks, our perspective shrinks. And, when our perspective shrinks, we need a Christ-perspective.

 In 2 Kings 6:15-17, that’s exactly what Elisha’s servant needed. The King of Dothan sends horses, chariots, and a huge army to surround the city where Elisha is staying. We read:

“When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. ‘Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?’ the servant asked. ‘Don’t be afraid,’ the prophet answered. ‘Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.’” Then Elisha prayed, “’Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see.’ Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”

 Like Elisha, the author of Hebrews understands that when our life stinks, our perspective shrinks and we need a God perspective. So, he begins his spiritual counsel by giving his readers *and us* a new set of spiritual eyeglasses, a new set of faith lenses through which we can gain God’s perspective on our trials and temptations. Those lenses are tinted with *Christ*. They are not rose-colored glasses; they’re Christ-colored glasses.

**B. Correcting How Long We Fix Our Focus: A Snapshot or a Video?— Hebrews 3:1; 12:1-2**

 The author first corrects where we fix our focus; then he corrects how long we fix our focus. In Hebrews 3:1, the phrase *fix your focus* is all one word in the Greek. It’s in the present tense and communicates continued mental attention and consideration. We focus our thoughts on Jesus and we let them remain fixed on Him. We discover the same idea in Hebrews 12:1-3.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with *perseverance* the race marked out for us. Let us *fix our eyes on Jesus*, the author and perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. *Consider him* who endured such opposition from sinful men, *so that you will not grow weary and lose heart*.”

 My niece, Kirsten, runs track at Crown Point—running the 100 and the 200. When she runs, she’s not looking at us cheering her on in the sidelines. She’s not looking down at her feet. She’s focused, looking straight ahead at the finish line. She doesn’t glance at the finish line when she starts the race and then look all around during the race. She keeps her focus continually.

 That’s what the author of Hebrews is saying, except that the Christian life is not a sprint, it’s a marathon. We have to run *with perseverance*. To do so, we have to focus on Jesus not simply at the beginning of our trial or temptation, but the entire time.

 When we’re suffering, we tend to cry out to Jesus quickly, which is wonderful. But after a while, our tendency is to look away from Jesus and look only at our trial. That’s *“Snapshot Christianity.”* I take a snapshot of Christ, I look at it, but I soon put it away in my scrapbook.

 God calls us to “Video Christianity.” We focus our minds on Christ *throughout* our crisis and we keep it there intently.

 Dottie Fritz was a dear friend to Shirley and me when I was Sr. Pastor at Uniontown Bible Church. Dottie was a believer in Christ *for over 70 years*. She passed away last month. At her funeral, they read a poem she had written late in her life. It was called *Pattern for Living*.

Dear Lord be my *Shepherd and faithful Guide*, *calm the storm and the swelling tide*.

Guide my footsteps along life’s way, keep me humble this I pray.

Feed me with Thy holy Word, songs of praises that I have heard.

Quench my thirst with waters pure, lead and make my pathway sure.

Be with me as I travel in this life, grant *mercy and courage in times of strife*.

Go before me and smooth the way, direct and lead to a brighter day.

Give me grace that I did not earn, and help Thy holy will discern.

You know my every *need and thought*, *may I* ***never*** *forget what Calvary wrought*.

 After over seven decades of being a believer, after never being able to have a child, after losing her husband after fifty-plus years of marriage, where did Dottie fix her thoughts? *“You know my* ***every*** *need and thought, may I* ***never******forget*** *what Calvary* ***wrought****.”* Ms. Dottie kept her focus on Christ and His cross.

 Good Friday was not a one-day-a-year event for Ms. Dottie; it was a 365-day-a-year remembrance. Easter was not a one-hour-a-year worship service for Ms. Dottie; it was a 168-hour-a-week memorial. Ms. Dottie did not live Snapshot Christianity. She lived Video Christianity—eyes and mind focused on Christ throughout every trial and temptation.

**II. Fortifying Our Faith: Fixed on Who Christ Truly Is: Hebrews 3:1; 1:2-3; 2:17-18; 4:15- 16**

 I’m not naïve. It’s hard to keep our focus fixed on Christ. It’s hard in that split second when someone cuts us off on 80/94. It’s also hard to keep our focus on Christ during the long haul of fighting a serious health issue. The Bible teaches that there is one primary reason why our spiritual eyesight gets out of focus—*blurred vision about who Christ truly is*.

 When bad things happen to us, Satan whispers. *“Life is bad. God is bad, too.”* Satan continues, *“Either God is in control and He doesn’t care. Or, God cares, but He’s not powerful enough to do anything about it.”* We need to correct Satan’s lie with Christ’s truth—the truth that *“God is good. He’s good alllllll the time!”* The Spirit counters Satan’s lie with the truth: God is in control *and* He cares. Jesus proves it by being our Sovereign *and* our Shepherd—allll the time!”

 Remember how the author of Hebrews says it in 3:1. “Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus”—what Jesus?—“the apostle and high priest whom we confess.” The word *therefore* reminds us to go back to the first two chapters of Hebrews. Additionally, the word *apostle* summarizes chapter 1, and the words *high priest* summarize chapter 2.

**A. Correcting Our Blurred Vision of Our Sovereign: Christ Is in Control!—Hebrews 1:2-3**

 Returning to chapter 1 helps us correct our blurred vision of our Sovereign. The entire message of Hebrews is that Christ is superior—to everything and everyone! Hebrews 1 emphasizes that by painting a picture of Christ as our Sovereign King. We view the video in Hebrews 1:2-3.

“In these last days God has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, *sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven*.”

 Try a mental exercise sometime with a group of Christians. Ask them to close their eyes and picture Jesus. Then ask them to describe their picture. Many will describe a meek and mild Jesus—a Jesus who is humble and kind. Jesus is all that. But Jesus is so much more than just nice.

 Remember in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, when Aslan, the lion King who is a picture of Christ, is on the move? Lucy asks Mr. and Mrs. Beaver if Aslan was safe and tame? Mr. Beaver answers, “Safe? Don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ’Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”

 If we picture Jesus just as a nice guy, then no wonder we’re tempted to turn our gaze away from Him when our trials and temptations seem endless. But if we see Jesus as the King of kings, then we’ll cling to Him and pray to Him 24/7.

**1. Clinging to Christ Our Sustainer**

 We cling to the King because Hebrews 1:3 tells us He’s continually “sustaining *all things* by his powerful word.” *Sustain* means to uphold, support, maintain, and keep together. It communicates what Paul says about Christ in Colossians 1:17, “In him *all things* hold together.”

 Do you feel like everything around you is falling apart? Cling to the One who holds the stars in place. Do you feel like you’re life is coming unglued? Glue your mind and your hope to the One who keeps the universe from unraveling.

**2. Clinging to Christ Our Savior**

 It’s not only in our suffering that we must cling to Christ the King, but even more importantly Christ is our only hope in our sin. When we give into temptation…yet again, when our temper, lust, pride, or selfishness defeats us…once again, rather than being overwhelmed by shame, we turn to the One who, according to Hebrews 1:3, “provided purification for our sin.”

 Christ died for sin once for all—for every sin you and I ever commit—past, present, or future. In the Old Testament, the priest had to sacrifice for the people over, and over, and over, and over again. Not so Jesus. Once for all He paid it all for all who turn to Him. In your battle against sin, focus on and turn to Christ your forgiving Savior who cleanses us from every sin.

**3. Clinging to Christ Our Sovereign**

 There’s one more amazing image embedded in verse 3: “He sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.” The Bible portrays the right hand to picture absolute power and universal authority. A seated king signifies a conquering king who is seated because the battle is over, the victory has been won.

 Jesus not only paid it all. He conquered all—sin and death. As He reigns seated on the throne, Romans 8:34 tells us what He’s doing. “Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who *also intercedes for us*.”

 What is Jesus doing this very minute? He’s praying for *you*. What is Jesus doing when Satan tempts you? He’s praying for you. What is Jesus doing when you give into sin? He’s praying for you. What is Jesus doing when your boss mistreats you, when your spouse abandons you, when your child dishonors you, when your parent disappoints you? He’s praying for you. The King of kings is praying for *you and for me*!

 When Satan whispers that God must not be in control, we focus our eyes on Jesus—the Jesus who is in total control because He is the Sustainer, Savior, and Sovereign who ever lives to pray for us.

**B. Correcting Our Blurred Vision of Our Shepherd: Christ Cares!—Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15-16**

 Let’s recall Satan’s lie. He says, “Since life is bad, God must either not be in control or not care.” We’ve just see portraits of Christ’s total control over everything in the universe and everything in our lives. So, Satan, not one to give up, now says, “Fine, he’s powerful, but he’s not loving.” In Hebrews 2, the author shows us a video of an eternally different Jesus. He shows us a Jesus who is *both* Sovereign *and* Shepherd, *both* in control *and* caring, *both* praying for us *and* listening to our prayers to Him.

 Jesus could have been a King who stayed aloof and aloft—on His throne, looking down on us with piercing eyes of judgment and a scowl on His face. That’s not our Jesus. That’s not the Jesus of Hebrews 2:17-18.

“For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, *he is able to help those who are being tempted*.”

That’s not the Jesus of Hebrews 4:15-16.

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to *sympathize* with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find *grace to help us* in our time of need.”

**1. Clinging to Christ Who Is Able to Sympathize with Us: Hebrews 4:15-16**

 When Satan tempts us to give into sin, we have in Jesus a high priest who is able to sympathize with us. He enters into the experience of our misery; He feels the heartache of our temptation; He has a compassionate heart of fellow feelings with us. In your temptation, He’s your loving shepherd putting His arm around you, delighting in you, and loving you with compassion and sympathy.

 When we’re tempted, we need to keep our eyes focused on Jesus *when He was tempted*. Picture Jesus in the wilderness after fasting 40 days, being tempted by and overcoming the evil one. Picture Jesus in the Garden being tempted, but resisting temptation by surrendering His will to His Father’s will. Jesus knows what it is to be tempted.

 Have you been tempted? Jesus knows temptation! Have you been betrayed? Jesus knows betrayal! Have you been abused? Jesus knows abuse! Have you suffered loss? Jesus knows loss! Have you been rejected and shamed! Jesus knows it all. And He sympathizes with all of us.

**2. Clinging to Christ Who Is Able to Help Us: Hebrews 2:17-18**

 In Hebrews 2:18, we’re told that our sympathetic High Priest is able to help those who are being tempted. The Greek word for *help* pictures a person eager to run to the cry of those in danger and to bring them aid. Did you hear that? When you cry; Jesus hears. When you call out; Jesus runs—*eagerly*.

 In Genesis, when Hagar was in the desert alone, abandoned, and mistreated, she cried out and God came. She rejoiced that she had seen the God who sees her. Christ your shepherd *sees you*. He knows, feels, and responds to your misery. He is your Shepherd who collects your tears in His bottle and is able to bring you comfort and strength.

 When David, a man after God’s own heart, sinned mightily against God—as an adulterer, murderer, abuser, liar, and hypocrite—he cried out to God in repentance in Psalm 51. God his Savior and Shepherd saw, heard, and forgave him. Just as He forgives us.

 In our suffering and our sin we turn to Christ our Sovereign Shepherd.

**3. Clinging to Christ Who Is Our Sovereign Shepherd: Isaiah 40:10-11**

 Isaiah 40:10-11 paints a beautiful picture of our Sovereign Shepherd.

“See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.”

 Notice which word the verse starts with? *See*—to picture, to focus, to get our spiritual eyesight corrected. Sound familiar?

 What do we see? We see our *Sovereign King*. He comes with power to rescue, rule, reward, and recompense—to deal with those who caused our suffering.

 What do we see? We see our *Good Shepherd*. He gathers you in His arms and He carries you close to His heart. He gently leads you by the still waters and through the valley of the shadow of death.

 This picture comes after 39 chapters of suffering and sin. Israel had been tried and found guilty before God. They’ve suffered horrifically as a result. But sin never has the last word. Grace always has the final say. God comforts His people. Jesus your Sovereign Shepherd comforts you.

**III. Connecting Our Family: Fixing Our Spiritual Eyesight: Hebrews 3:7-14**

 Imagine Frodo, in the middle of his trials and temptations, asking the author of Hebrews, *“What are we holding onto?”* In Hebrews 1-3, we’ve found the answer, “It’s not who you’re holding onto, but *Who* is holding you. Jesus, your Sovereign Shepherd, holds you up and holds you together.

**A. Correcting Our Sinful View of God’s Heart: Hebrews 3:7-11**

 After sharing that message of encouragement, the author shifts to a message of warning about abandoning our Christ-centered focus. Since he’s been talking about focusing our eyes on Jesus, beginning in Hebrews 3:7-11, he shares a visual warning in the form of an illustration from the Old Testament.

“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.’ So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’”

 To understand this story, we have to travel back in time to Exodus 14 and the story of the redemption of Israel. On their exodus from Egypt, they arrive at the Red Sea with Pharaoh’s armies hot on their heels. All Israel watches in amazement as God miraculously parts the waters so they can cross on dry land, and then they watch as God collapses the waters on Pharaoh’s evil forces. In celebration in Exodus 15, God’s people sing one of the greatest praise hymns of all time. Then in Exodus 16, God provides them with manna to sustain them. Not only that, but every day they see with their own eyes the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night guiding them. Talk about focusing their eyes on their Sovereign Shepherd!

 Yet…how soon they forget and how soon they lose focus. In Exodus 17 they quarrel with Moses and say, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt!?” They’re saying, “We were better off with Pharaoh than with God! We were better off slaves to Egypt than servants to God.” Even worse, they say, “Is the Lord among us or not?” They’re saying, “Life is bad, *and* God is bad, too. He’s either not in control or not caring. Either way, we don’t trust His heart!”

 *In their trials, they put God on trial!* And their verdict is clear: God is not worthy to be trusted! They hold God in contempt, seeing Him as a lightweight, refusing to believe that God was their Sovereign Shepherd. After an entire generation of doubting God, in Numbers 14:10-11, the Lord appears and asks, “How long will these people treat me with contempt. *How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them*?”

 In sharing this story, the author of Hebrews is saying, “If the Exodus redemption is not enough, what is? If the cross and resurrection are not enough, what is?”

 Like the Israelites of old, the Christians of Hebrews had experienced their redemption. They had their redemption stories. They were gloriously saved from sin, forgiven, and accepted into God’s family. Out of gratitude they loved God and followed Him anywhere. And like the Israelites of old, these Christians were facing trials and were tempted to doubt God’s good heart. Would they respond like the Israelites by turning their backs on God?

 Like the OT Israelites and the NT Christians, we have *our* redemption stories. We can think back to when we were saved from sin, forgiven, and accepted into God’s family. Out of gratitude, we loved God and followed Him anywhere. And now, we face trials, and with our trials we face temptation.

 Hebrews 3:7-11 is confronting us with the truth that it is possible to trust Christ for our salvation, yet distrust Christ when hard times come. *When we face life’s trials, Satan tempts us to put God on trial!*

**B. Correcting One Another in Love: Hebrews 3:12-14**

 When trials come, *we* come to a faith point. Our hearts waver between*, “I trust Christ. I trust Him not.”* What are *we* to do? How do *we* guard against giving into the temptation to doubt God’s good heart?

 Notice that I’ve said *we* several times. That’s because the author of Hebrews addresses us as *brothers* in verse 12. “See to it *brothers*, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.” There are no Lone Ranger Christians. We’re all in this together. We overcome trials and temptations through Christ with the Body of Christ—with one another.

**1. What to Discourage: Hard Hearts That Doubt God’s Good Heart: Hebrews 3:12**

 We’re told how we do that when we read “see to it.” The Greek word for *see to it* means to direct our focus toward, to fix our attention on. It’s in the present tense which means that as brothers and sisters in Christ we are to continually keep a watchful shepherding eye on one another. *Under Christ the great Shepherd we are to shepherd one another toward Christ*.

 As we shepherd one another, what are we to see? We’re to see that none of our brothers or sisters gives into the temptation to have a sinful unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

 Let’s consider in practice what it might look like for us to apply Hebrews 3:12 to our relationships. Every Sunday before church we could each pray:

“Father, I know that, like me, my brothers and sisters at CCC are struggling; suffering. I know that they, like me, are being tempted by Satan to doubt Your good heart. As I talk to my brothers and sisters before and after church today, empower me to be a good shepherd. To listen not only to their words about their trials, but also to their words about their temptation. Help me to care about their hearts and to point my brothers and sisters to Christ. Please empower them to point me to Christ…because I’m desperate for You.”

 That would be a different way to get ready for church on Sunday morning, wouldn’t it?

 Here’s what it might look like in our small groups. When we share prayer requests with one another, we would not stop with saying, “I received a bad result from my medical test. Please pray for good results.” We would also say, “And please pray that I would trust God’s good heart because I have to be honest, this terrifies me. And Satan is tempting me to doubt God.”

 Now that would be a different prayer request, right?

 Here’s how it might sound in our families. A family member comes home after a rough day at work or school. They vent a bit about their boss, a teacher, or a bully. You listen well, care, and empathize. But then you say, lovingly but boldly, “So, how are you doing with God in all of this?” Or, “How do you think God wants to use this to make you more like Jesus?”

 Applying Hebrews 3:12 could turn our family conversations upside down!

**2. What to Encourage: Soft Hearts That Trust God’s Good Heart: Hebrews 3:13-14**

 Hebrews 3:12 tells us what to *discourage*—hard hearts that doubt God’s good heart. Hebrews 3:13-14 tell us what to *encourage*—soft hearts that trust God’s good heart.

“But encourage *one another* daily, as long as it is called Today, so that *none of you* may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. *We* have come to share in Christ if *we* hold firmly till the end the confidence *we* had at first.”

 To *encourage* means to come along side and help by speaking the truth about Jesus in love. Jesus uses the same word to describe the Holy Spirit in John 14-16 where He tells us that the Spirit is our Encourager who guides us into truth about who Jesus is.

 That’s what verses 13-14 say we need to do—focus on redirecting one another to focus on Christ and the faith we had in Him when we first came to Christ. “Hold firmly to the confidence you had at first”—when you were first saved.

 When we trusted Christ as our Lord and Savior, we followed Him everywhere, just like the Israelites did after they had witnessed their great redemption. So, we encourage each other to trust Christ *today* just like we trusted Him as our Sovereign Shepherd on the day we were saved.

 So, an encouraging spiritual conversation might sound like this.

“I’m so sorry that you’re going through all this. I’m going to pray that God might change your situation. But we both know that God is more concerned about our becoming like Christ than He is about just making our life easy. So, I’m also going to pray that as you go through this, you cling to Christ just like you did when you first asked Him to be your Lord and Savior. I’m going to pray that you trust God’s good heart even when life is bad. I’m going to pray that when Satan tempts you to doubt God and to give in to sin, that the Holy Spirit will remind you of Isaiah 40:10-11—that Jesus is your Sovereign Shepherd whose all-powerful arms hold you close to His all-loving heart.”

 That’s the church. That’s what God calls each of us to be for one another. That’s what it looks like to be God’s family—brothers and sisters in Christ.

**The Big Question: “But Can *We* Be Like This? Can *We* Be Spiritual Encouragers?**

 Now, some of us might be thinking. “Well, super-saints can be like that. Maybe Pastor Steve can be like that. But the rest of us—we could never carry on spiritual conversations like that.”

 That’s what the Israelites from Exodus to Numbers thought. They saw their enemies as *giants* and they saw themselves as *grasshoppers*.

 The author of Hebrews does *not* see us as grasshoppers! In Hebrews 3:1 he calls us *holy brothers*…” He’s talking about you and me—about everyone who trusts Jesus. We are saints and sons/daughters. When we place our faith in Christ, God makes us new creations—holy brothers and sisters. We’re a holy family helping one another to persevere through trials and temptations.

 Many in our church love to run—5Ks, half-marathons, marathons. And we love to encourage one another in our running. Last year at this time I was training for my first half-marathon. Without the encouragement and coaching of John and Connie Jordan and Angela and Paul Rodriquez, I never would have attempted it.

 When I ran that half-marathon, I almost did not persevere. At the eleven-mile mark, I was doing great, but then I hit *the wall*. Without the encouragement of my running partner, John Jordan, I would have quit. I didn’t finish fast. But I finished the race…because of my encouragers.

 If we can help one another to persevere in a *physical* race, surely, as holy brothers and sisters empowered by Christ, we can help one another to persevere in our *spiritual* race by fixing our focus on Christ our Sovereign Shepherd.

 I’d like to pray for each of us that we would do just that—continually fix our focus on Christ our Sovereign Shepherd….