**Reflections – 31 August to 6 September – Confidence to care**

**Bible study on Hebrews 13:1-8,15-16**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

Lord, we come to worship you,
the one who cares for us more deeply
than we can understand.
Give us the confidence to care deeply
for others, as you care for us.
**Amen.**

**Read the passage**

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.*

Hebrews 13: 1-8,15-16

**13**Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. 2Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. 3Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

4Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. 5Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said,

“Never will I leave you;
    never will I forsake you.”[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%2013&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30247a)]

6So we say with confidence,

“The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.
    What can mere mortals do to me?”[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%2013&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30248b)]

7Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. 8Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

15Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. 16And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

 **Explore and respond to the text**

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than onc, or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

**Bible notes**

The final chapter of Hebrews is different in focus from the rest of the letter, offering encouragement to keep on in faithful worship and loving concern for others. The writer asks for consistency in a Christian lifestyle – verse 1 could be translated ‘abide in mutual love’, as Jesus encouraged his disciples to ‘abide’ in him (John 15:4). Hospitality is an expression of practical love and can lead to unexpected rewards, as when the angels visited Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18). Empathetic solidarity with those in prison, faithfulness within marriage, reliable leadership – all this contributes to the well-being of the community and gives them the solid foundation to flourish in faith.

Strong networks of social care are valuable in sustaining community, but the heart of this stability is their relationship with God in Jesus. The writer quotes Psalm 118:6, a strong affirmation of trust in the Lord’s readiness to defend with steadfast love. This goes deeper than the simple instruction not to depend on money. The writer expresses absolute trust and confidence in Jesus, who is unchanged, unchanging, unchangeable. He is eternally present with God, who is able to make us complete (v.21). Therefore, God’s people can watch over one another in love, untroubled by concerns about the hostility of others (Psalm 56:4,11), because, when God is present in Jesus, nothing can bring them to harm. This is expressed (vv.15- 16) as ‘sacrifice’. Hebrews is emphatic that the foundational sacrifice is that of Jesus (10:12), but his self-offering provides a model for Christian life. We offer a double sacrifice of praise to God alongside care for others – the prophets remind us that praise without service is empty (Isaiah 1:12-17). Sacrifice is no longer restricted to a priestly group – all Christians are urged to live a sacrificial lifestyle because we can depend on our covenant relationship with God in Christ.

 **Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

A prison chaplain with an interest in labyrinths realised that they could be used to help long- term prisoners with the stresses of confinement. This led to the provision of labyrinths for use in exercise yards and finger labyrinths in cells. That chaplain made a bold move in suggesting the adoption of labyrinths throughout the prison. The Hebrews reading suggests that we should entertain strangers and remember prisoners as though we were there in prison with them. How can we step out of our comfort zone and take risks when it comes to caring for others, in the confidence that ‘The Lord is our helper’?

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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**Questions**

* Is there a situation or task you are being called to that requires confidence?
* Could your church be bolder in reaching out to marginalised groups?
* What courageous actions could you take to support prisoners or victims of torture?

**Prayer**

God of all, your generous heart draws us in
to be cared for, supported and inspired.
We praise you that you call us to care for,
support and inspire others.
Thank you for the confidence to be bold, to take risks
and to trust that you will bless us with the gifts we need.
Thank you for your beautiful, inclusive and strong love,
which is the same yesterday, today and for ever.
**Amen.**