

# Words of Encouragement From the Heavenly Sanctuary<sup>1</sup>



## SABBATH—DECEMBER 21

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Hebrews 10:19–25; Hebrews 4:16; Exodus 24:8; James 4:7, 8; John 13:34; Hebrews 10:24, 25.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “We also have a great priest over the house of God. So let us come near to God with an honest and true heart. Let us come near with a faith that is sure and strong. Our hearts have been sprinkled. Our minds have been cleansed from a sense of guilt” (Hebrews 10:21, 22, NIV).

**THROUGHOUT THE BOOK OF HEBREWS, VERSES ABOUT CHRISTIAN FAITH ARE MENTIONED ALONG WITH VERSES ABOUT CHRISTIAN LIVING.** In other words, the Bible has advice for useful living. The “what” of faith leads to the “how” of living that faith. In Hebrews, Paul paints a wonderful picture of Christ as our Sacrifice and High Priest (Hebrews 7:1–10:18). Then, he encourages believers to live according to the principles (important rules) of these truths. This encouragement is seen in Hebrews 10:19–25.

These verses are one long sentence in Greek. They hold two basic facts that lead to three pieces of advice. Each piece starts with the wording “let us,” and each has the famous three words—*faith*, *hope*, and *love*. Also each “let us” piece of advice includes another facet (side) of Christian faith.

This week we will study Hebrews 10:19–25 and its useful encouragements for Christian living.

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1. heavenly sanctuary—the place in heaven where Jesus works as our High Priest before the throne.

**SUNDAY—DECEMBER 22****ENTRY INTO THE HEAVENLY SANCTUARY (HEBREWS 10:19–21)**

**Read Hebrews 4:16; Hebrews 6:19, 20; and Hebrews 10:19–21. Into what can believers enter? And what does this mean for us? What hope is offered here? More important, how much should this hope influence our life and faith?**

Believers can have spiritual entry into the heavenly sanctuary, to the very throne of God. So, we can seek closeness to God. This is because our “entry” was made possible by the blood of Christ and by His being our High Priest. The verses (Hebrews 4:16; Hebrews 6:19, 20) promise us that our soul has an anchor in Jesus Christ. This is because He is in the very presence of God. The promise for us is that Christ fully connected with God after He became the heavenly High Priest (Hebrews 6:20). After He became the High Priest in heaven, then Christ sat on the heavenly throne. This shows Him as King of the universe (Revelation 3:21).

The good news for us is that Christ is with the Father. No earthly priest, who himself is sinful, can serve us. We have the better Priest. Nothing separates the Father from the Son. Because Christ is perfect and sinless, there is no need for a veil that separates God’s holiness from Jesus, our High Priest (Hebrews 10:20).

“What does intercession<sup>2</sup> mean? It is the golden chain that unites limited man to the throne of the unlimited God. The sinner whom Christ has died to save has entry to the throne of God through prayers. And his prayer is taken up by Jesus who has bought him with His own blood. Our great High Priest puts His righteousness [holy life] on the side of the sincere [honest] believer. And the prayer of Christ joins with the prayer of the human.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him*, page 78.

What a beautiful promise we have that we can have a close connection with the Father through prayer. This is because of what Jesus has done and is doing for us!

**Think about what it means that Jesus is working for you in heaven. Why do you need His work in heaven so greatly?**



**We can enter the heavenly sanctuary, to the very throne of God.**

**MONDAY—DECEMBER 23****CLEANSSED AND SINCERE (Hebrews 10:22)**

2. intercession—the process during which a third person works to bring peace between two quarreling persons or groups.

**Read Hebrews 10:22. What conditions (rules) for reaching God in the heavenly sanctuary are laid down in this verse?**

According to this verse, worshipers should meet four conditions when they come close to God:

1. *Come with a “sincere heart” (NIV).* The heart is the center of our life, our thoughts, our emotions (feelings), our will, and our character (thoughts and feelings; actions). God wants us to be sincere. But the heart can become sincere only if it is cleansed. This does not mean that we are perfect. But this does mean that we are working hard in showing the character (holiness) of Christ.

2. *Come in “full assurance [belief] of faith.”* As we saw in yesterday’s study, there is no more reason to doubt that we will reach God through prayer.

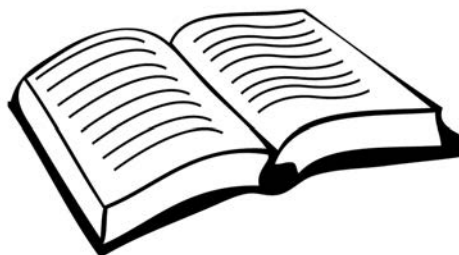
3. *Come “with our hearts sprinkled [clean] from an evil conscience.”* The sprinkling of the heart is sanctuary language that reminds us of the blood sprinkled upon the people at the wilderness tabernacle (tent) (Exodus 24:8; Leviticus 8:23, 24). This service made them “clean” but could not cleanse their conscience (Hebrews 9:9, 13). But the cleansing in the true tabernacle in heaven is a cleansing of the conscience, done by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 9:14). The justification (cleansing and forgiveness) of the sorrowful sinner is symbolized (shown) by this cleansing. We can

have a clear conscience because we have been forgiven.

4. *Come with “our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:22, NIV).* This sounds like an example of Christian baptism. But we can also understand it as the “washing of water with the word [the Bible]” (Ephesians 5:26, NASB). We can do so by reading the Bible and using its principles (important rules) in our lives.

In James 4:7, 8, James struggles with the “double-minded”<sup>3</sup> (NIV) attitude (thinking) of his readers. They seem to have lost their single-mindedness toward God. They have fallen into sin and are in serious danger. But Jesus uses language that shows the purity at the sanctuary. This is because it is truly a sanctuary idea that reaching God is possible only if the thoughts and actions are pure.

**It should be clear that only God can cleanse our hearts. The question is: what painful choices do we make that let Him do this work of grace<sup>4</sup> in our lives?**



**We must be washed clean through the “washing of water in the word [the Bible]” by reading God’s Word (Ephesians 5:26).**

3. “double-minded”—thinking of doing one thing but really doing the other; being two-faced.

4. grace—God’s gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

**TUESDAY—DECEMBER 24****FAITH: BE CONFIDENT  
(UNAFRAID; BOLD) (Hebrews 4:16)**

Read Hebrews 10:19–25 again. One theme appears again and again. That is “confidence.” The Greek word for “confidence” (Hebrews 10:19, NASB) means a boldness, courage, and fearlessness in our new relationship with God.

Originally the word meant an openness of speech. This could mean that a person can freely reach God through prayer. This kind of openness in our relationship with God leads to a joyful confidence. The reason for our confidence is that we have a High Priest in heaven. Through Him we can reach God. This entry is unlimited and not blocked by anything but ourselves and our wrong choices. In other words, we have an open invitation to come into the heavenly sanctuary.

Where does this confidence come from? It does not come from ourselves. It comes from recognizing, again, that only the blood of Jesus has made it possible for us to reach God.

**Hebrews 3:6, 14; Hebrews 4:16; Hebrews 6:11; and Hebrews 11:1 speak about confidence and having faith in God for our salvation. What kind of confidence do these verses describe?**

Having faith in God and confidence for our salvation do not secure us to

ourselves but to Christ. These conditions are not dependent upon who we are but upon who Jesus is. It is interesting to note that the Bible encourages believers to have full faith (Hebrews 6:11; Hebrews 10:22). Clearly, the new way has been forever opened through Jesus’ death. This will lead us without fail to full confidence (faith). Nothing less is expected.

There are two ways to have Christian confidence (full belief) and keep it in faith. One way is through faith itself (Ephesians 3:12). And the other way is through faithful Christian service to others (1 Timothy 3:13). Both of them are necessary and important. In Hebrews, too, firm knowledge of faith and encouragement of oneself to be a faithful Christian go hand in hand. Christian living is never separated from Christian faith.

**What things in life challenge your confidence (faith) in God or your full belief in His good will for you? What can you do to help to protect yourself from this spiritual danger?**



**Service to others makes us strong in the faith.**

**WEDNESDAY—DECEMBER 25****HOPE: BE STEADFAST AND UNSWERVING (ALWAYS FAITHFUL) (Hebrews 3:6)**

**Read Hebrews 3:6; Hebrews 3:14; Hebrews 4:14; Hebrews 6:18; and Hebrews 10:23. What do all these verses have that is the same? What should believers hold on to?**

It is important to have the assurance of (full belief in) salvation. It is also important for us Christians to be faithful and hold on to the hope offered to us all. In Hebrews, to hold fast is a very important and serious call. Some believers were slipping away from their Christian faith and hope. So, Paul had to encourage them not to give up. The verse states the things that are worth holding on to: hope, confidence (faith), assurance (belief), and confession (asking God for forgiveness of our sins). All of these words are related to Christian belief. This is because we can do these things because our hope is not in ourselves but in Jesus and what He has done for us. The moment we forget that important truth, we will surely lose confidence.

These verses challenge us to be steadfast (faithful) from the “beginning” (Hebrews 3:14) and “unto the end” (Hebrews 3:6, 14; Hebrews 6:11). To do so “without wavering [becoming weak]” (Hebrews 10:23) means having a strong, rock-like faith. With that, whatever may happen, our hope remains the same. Our loyalty to God is unchanged. This is because

we can trust that God is faithful and will do what He has promised.

There is no question that God is true to His Word (the Bible). He fulfilled (completed) the promise that He made to Abraham and Sarah (read also Romans 4:19–21). God fulfilled the promise of Christ’s first coming (Galatians 3:19). And God will also keep the promise of His return (Hebrews 12:26). But God’s greatest promise is eternal life, which He promised even before time began (Titus 1:2; 1 John 2:25).

God’s faithfulness is unchangeable. “Even if we are not faithful, he will remain faithful. He must be true to himself” (2 Timothy 2:13, NIV). Our unfaithfulness or disbelief will not change God’s plan for us. His promises remain firm (strong) even though we are weak. The promises will still be available for us because being faithful is part of God’s nature.

**It is so easy to get discouraged because of our sins. How can we overcome those sins? But at the same time, how do we not give up when we fail? Why must we hold on to these promises, especially when we fail?**



**We can always trust God to keep His promises, as He did with Sarah and Abraham.**

**THURSDAY—DECEMBER 26****LOVE: ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER (Hebrews 10:24)**

The encouragement in Hebrews 10:23 is focused on (points to) a person's attitude (feeling). But the next one in Hebrews 10:24 has the community (group) of believers in mind. We do not walk alone on our path with Christ. We always should care for one another.

The challenge to love one another is a long-time duty of a Christian (John 13:34, 35; Galatians 5:13). But loving one another does not just happen naturally. The work of being thoughtful of others suggests hard and careful planning. We are asked to pay attention to our fellow believers and see how we could encourage them to love others and to do good works. Unfortunately, we end up making others angry more often than we encourage them to Christian love.

Then let us work together for the best of the community. In this way our efforts to love will influence others to love and do good works, too.

**Read Hebrews 10:24, 25. What do “love” and “good works” have to do with the assemblies [church groups]?**

Hebrews makes the point that we can show love toward one another in Christian meetings. If someone does not come to worship, how can he or she ever fulfill (complete) Christ's

law of love? Some people may think that they have “good” reasons to stay away from Christian meetings. But Hebrews touches on the sensitive issue (problem) that it might be their own lack of love that keeps them away. If one wants, one can always find reasons to avoid attending church. Those reasons are poor when we think of the real reason for coming to church. The real reason is that we can be a blessing to others if we come.

This is much more important when we know that the day of Christ's return comes nearer and nearer. At the beginning of Hebrews 10:19–25, Paul warned believers to draw near to God in the heavenly sanctuary. And at its closing, Paul reminds them that the Day of the Lord (the Second Coming) comes closer to them. Christ's return should always be an important reason for being good Christians.

**Who in your church do you want to encourage with your words, actions, or presence at church? If you are serious about this plan, you can make a big difference in people's lives and, in turn, be blessed yourself.**

**FRIDAY—DECEMBER 27**

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** “Jesus, in His work as heaven's High Priest, would be far better in honor and glory than the earthly high priest. . . . This Saviour was to stand between the Most High [God] and His people. Through this plan, a way was opened for the guilty

sinner to reach God through the work of the High Priest. The sinner could not come in his own person or with his guilt upon him. Christ alone could open the way, by making an offering equal to the demands of God’s law. He was perfect and without sin. The terrible results of sin could never have been known, if God had not fixed this sin problem by paying an inestimable [unlimited] price.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy [Special Messages]*, volume 2, page 11.

“Faith in the high priestly work of Christ in heaven will keep us steadfast and strong against temptations that bother us in the church.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 7A, page 484.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- ❶ Quickly read through the book of Hebrews. How are we called to act in ways that directly come from our faith?
- ❷ Think more deeply about the idea that we can reach God through prayer. What does that mean? How should this influence our lives, especially in times of temptation or in times of discouragement over our

spiritual condition (state)?

- ❸ What is the difference between “full assurance [belief]” of faith and a presumptuous<sup>5</sup> attitude?
- ❹ Think about this sentence taken from the Ellen G. White quote in Friday’s additional study: “The terrible results of sin could never have been known, if God had not fixed this sin problem by paying an inestimable [unlimited] price” (adapted). What does that tell us about just how bad sin is that it cost an “inestimable price,” which means the life of Jesus? How do we understand the idea of “inestimable price”? How does the fact that Jesus is the Creator help us to understand this wonderful truth? Knowing these things, how can our lives not be changed? How can we know these things and not want to teach them to others?
- ❺ How can we develop spiritual friendships in which we encourage one another to be more loving and to live a life of good deeds (actions)? What spiritual benefits (profits) do you gain from “assembling (meeting) together”? What would you miss if you could not worship with other Christians in church?

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5. presumptuous—taking for granted or assuming (guessing) too much.