

**“Hope and Help”**  
**Hebrews 4:12-16**

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Hebrews appears to be a book wrapped in mystery. E. F. Scott referred to it as the “Riddle of the New Testament,” because it leaves us with many unanswered questions. We don’t know who wrote it, who it was written to or when it was written.

What we are fairly certain about is that it is a collection of sermons written by someone very skilled in language and literature. The purest and best Greek in the New Testament is in this book shrouded in mystery.

This wordsmith was not timid or shy. He or she boldly challenged the readers to be faithful followers of Jesus, even in times of persecution. Jesus was faithful all the way to the cross and they should follow his example.

This challenge did not come without help or hope, as today’s text mentions. The writer referred to Jesus as a “high priest” who understood their struggles and was ready to help them fulfill their commitments.

What intrigued me about this text is the way it points to the kind of help we need on our journey of faith. The writer says that we need someone to examine our heart, hold us accountable for our actions and help us with our struggles. Let me explain.

**We need someone to examine our heart for harmful thoughts and desires.** It appears the writer of Hebrews felt this way, for he wrote that the word of God was able “to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Why do you think he felt the heart needed to be judged?

He knew that his own heart harbored both good and bad thoughts, and without help, those evil thoughts would take root and bear fruit. Too much was at stake to allow greed, jealousy, envy, hatred, arrogance, bitterness, deception and hypocrisy grow. His heart needed to be examined with a discerning eye.

We all know how serious viruses are in a computer. What would we do without protection software like Webroot Spy Sweeper or McAfee Security Center? Their discerning eye keeps our computers from crashing or important information from being stolen and used illegally.

The author of Hebrews knew his heart needed to be examined for unhealthy influences. Where did the writer find this discerning eye? He found it in scripture, which he characterized as “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit and joints from marrow.”

It seems the word of God became a mirror before him, exposing his inner most thoughts and desires. What was hidden from others came into view as he allowed God to speak to him through sacred stories and lessons.

Perhaps he learned to trust God to examine his heart from his study of the Psalms. “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting” Psalm 139:23-24.

Is this your prayer, too? Do you allow God to speak to you through the biblical text? Has your study of scripture forced you to confront some things you had been hiding or ignoring? Has it led to confession and repentance? I hope so.

**We need someone to hold us accountable for our actions by asking us tough questions.** This writer certainly did. “Before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account” Hebrews 4:13.

It is obvious that this writer believed in accountability. He knew that he was capable of hurting others and himself and finding ways to justify it. This was unacceptable and needed to be prevented. Accountability would go a long way in making this possible.

Are you familiar with accountability partners? These are people who have permission to ask a friend or client tough questions. What did you do? Why did you do it? What were the results? Who was helped or hurt by your actions? Are you proud of what you did? Who approved your actions or was disappointed? What would you do differently if you had the chance? What changes do you need to make?

To whom are you accountable? Do you have someone who asks you tough questions? Do you need someone? The writer of Hebrews did. Perhaps you do, too.

**We need someone to help us with our struggles so we’ll not be overcome.** It would be cruel for someone to point out our flaws or challenges without offering to help us deal with them. Who helped the writer of this passage?

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 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” Hebrews 4:14-16.

Where did the writer turn when he needed help overcoming temptation or confronting stiff challenges? He turned to someone who understood struggle, Jesus, the Son of God. In him, he found a kind and compassionate advocate who offered both hope and help. The Lord did not look upon him with disdain or criticize him for his failures. Instead, he brought the best out in him while forgiving the worst.

**Who did this for you?** Who became your priest when you needed one? Who listened to your story, entered into your struggle, held your hand, told you of God’s love and modeled transforming grace?

**Who needs your help today?** Who needs you to be God’s voice of truth and compassion and walk with them on their journey of self-discovery and transformation?

For me, one of the most powerful lessons in our text is the need for people along a common journey to support each other. It is not the person in the ivory tower who can help us most, but “the one who, in every respect, has been tested as we are.” If you have been tested and know the sense of failure and frustration, your help is needed by those undergoing tests. Be a fountain of mercy and grace from which they can freely drink.

Recently I received an email that reminded me of something I had long forgotten. I grew up in a culture where the words hope and help were used interchangeably. “I am going to hope my neighbor,” I would hear from time to time from someone in the first church I served. “That nice person hoped me,” others would say.

At first, I thought it rather odd to hear the word hope used like this. I grew to appreciate it and realize it was most appropriate to be used this way.

Today’s text offers both hope and help. Even this mystery writer could not separate them.

