

Dr. David A. deSilva, Hebrews, Session 13

The Sermon "to the Hebrews" and the Art of Preaching, 6-min. Video Overview

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Today, we're going to dive into something pretty amazing. A masterclass in motivation from, of all places, an ancient sermon known as the Book of Hebrews. We're going to break down the surprisingly modern and powerful strategies its author used to fire up a community that was right on the verge of quitting.

I mean, seriously, think about it. How do you do that? It's a timeless problem, right? Whether you're a coach, a CEO, or just trying to help a friend who's down, getting people who are losing hope to keep going is one of the toughest things to do. Well, the author of Hebrews was staring this exact problem in the face.

And their solution? Wow. It's a masterclass in persuasion. Let's see how they pulled it off.

Okay, first things first, we need to get a picture of who the author was even talking to. This wasn't some happy-go-lucky group. No, the preacher was addressing a community in a deep, deep crisis.

They were feeling a ton of pressure from the world around them. So they were actually suffering for what they believed. They were being ostracized by society.

And their motivation was just hitting rock bottom. It had gotten so bad that some people had just stopped showing up to their gatherings altogether. So for the preacher, this wasn't some abstract theological exercise.

It was a real high-stakes communication crisis. And this is really the core of all persuasion, right? You have to move people from point A to point B. The preacher needed to get his audience from a place of despair all the way to perseverance. Now, he could have just yelled at them or maybe offered some simple sympathy.

But instead, he took a totally different route, one that was as brilliant as it was unexpected. So instead of diving into their immediate problems, he did the opposite. He zoomed way, way out.

With this absolutely breathtaking opening, he completely reframed their whole situation, forcing them to see their tiny problems within a huge cosmic context. And the change in perspective here is just massive. You see, they were completely fixated on their local struggles, feeling small and powerless.

But the preacher redirects their gaze. He basically says, hey, listen, the most important thing happening in the entire universe right now isn't your suffering. It's that God himself has spoken through his son.

He reminds them of the sun's cosmic power and the incredible glory that's waiting for them. He lifts their chins, gets their eyes off the mud at their feet, and gives them a reason to keep going. OK, so once he established that huge picture, the preacher then gives their present moment a brand new and really urgent meaning.

He pulls out a powerful story from their own history to frame the choice they were facing right then and there. He brings up the story of the wilderness generation. You know, ancient Israel had been rescued.

They'd seen absolute miracles, and they were standing on the very edge of the promised land. But what did they do? Out of fear and distrust, they turned back. The preacher uses this story as a perfect overlay for his audience's situation.

He's telling them, that's you. You're at that same threshold. You've come this far.

Are you going to trust God and cross over, or are you going to turn back in fear? And here, the preacher nails down the real danger. It wasn't the pressure from the outside. No, the true threat was internal.

It was that their own hearts would become hard, that they'd lose their capacity to trust, become spiritually numb, and turn away from the very God calling them home. Now, this next part might actually surprise you. The preacher didn't just pat them on the back and say, they're there.

His third strategy was to challenge them, and challenge them hard. He held them to a much higher standard of maturity and responsibility. I mean, the nerve on this guy, it's incredible.

He basically tells them, look, you've been at this long enough. You should be the ones teaching others by now, not just fending for yourselves. He expected them to step up, to use what they already knew, and to take real responsibility for encouraging the others who were struggling.

He wasn't just comforting them. He was calling them to be great. Strategy number four.

This one is all about respecting your audience. You know, we live in an age of soundbites and easy answers. This preacher did the exact opposite.

He understood that if you want to build a faith that lasts, you have to tackle the hard questions with real substance. Just think about that for a second. He dedicated four entire chapters.

That's a huge portion of his whole sermon to digging into one single complicated theological issue. He didn't avoid the tough stuff. He ran straight at it.

He was showing his listeners that he respected their intelligence and that their faith was built on a foundation that could handle the toughest questions. He was giving them theological meat, not just milk. And that brings us to his final strategy, which might just be the most powerful of all.

He tapped into that natural human drive we all have for excellence, for ambition, but he completely rerouted it. He pointed it away from worldly goals and toward a much higher spiritual purpose. You could say the preacher created his own version of Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous, but for faith.

He held up these heroes who weren't defined by money or power, but by their wild, radical loyalty to God, even when it cost them everything. He taught his audience that the shame they were feeling for their beliefs was actually a badge of honor, something worth far more than any prize this world could offer. And to really hammer this point home, he paints this unforgettable picture.

He tells them their life is like a massive athletic competition, and up in the stands, cheering them on, are all the heroes of the faith who have run this same race before them. See? Their struggle wasn't some lonely, shameful thing. It was a noble contest with a heavenly crowd and an eternal prize on the line.

So there you have it. A five-step masterclass in motivation from 2,000 years ago. One, start big.

Get that cosmic view. Two, frame the present moment so the stakes are clear. Three, demand greatness and call people up.

Four, go deep. Answer the hard questions with substance. And five, completely redefine what it means to win.

It's an incredible framework. You know, this ancient strategy, it really forces us to ask some big questions about our own lives, doesn't it? What's the great contest that you're in? And when you look up into the stands for encouragement, whose faces do you see? Who are the heroes that inspire you to keep running? That's a thought worth hanging on to. Thanks for digging into this with me.