

Briefing Doc: Hebrews 3:12-13

For the message, "Let Us Encourage One Another" given by Pastor John Ferguson at Mercy Hill Church in Bryan/College Station, Texas, on April 13, 2025

This is a fun AI generated briefing document (edited) to help you process and reflect upon what we learned in our study together of this passage

Summary:

This study centers on the passage in Hebrews 3:12-13, emphasizing the crucial role of mutual encouragement within the Christian community to prevent self-deception and falling away from faith. The core message is that Christianity is not a solitary endeavor but a relational spirituality where believers are called to "exhort one another every day." The study highlights our inherent capacity for self-deception and the necessity of community to gain a more accurate understanding of ourselves and to persevere in our faith journey.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. The Danger of Self-Deception:

- Several quotes from authors like Jodi Picoult ("You can fool yourself, you know. You'd think it's impossible, but it turns out it's the easiest thing of all."), Benjamin Franklin ("Who has deceived you so much as yourself?"), and Derek Landy ("The lies we tell other people are nothing to the lies we tell ourselves.") underscore the pervasive nature of this human self-deception.
- The speaker poses the central question: "How do you know if you are deceiving yourself?" prompting listeners to consider their own self-awareness and openness to correction.

2. Christianity as a Relational Spirituality ("One Anothering"):

- The message and the text emphasize that following Jesus is not a "solo project" but a "community project."
- The passage in Hebrews is presented as a key example of this relational aspect, where believers are called to actively engage in each other's lives for spiritual well-being.

1. The Warning in Hebrews 3:12-13:

- The passage itself is quoted: "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another

every day as long as it is called today that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

- The context of Hebrews is explained: it was written to Jewish believers facing persecution and tempted to revert to Judaism for safety. The warning is against developing an "evil, unbelieving heart" that leads to "fall[ing] away from the living God," which the speaker connects to the doctrine of apostasy.
- While affirming the belief in "eternal security" and "once saved always saved" the speaker someone can profess Christianity for a season but fall away (i.e, apostasy). Hence the call in the passage to exhort one another to persevere.

2. The Meaning and Importance of "Exhort One Another":

- The Greek word for "exhort" is identified as *parakalew*, meaning "to come alongside someone to encourage them, to urge, to console, to cheer up, to invite or to summon."
- The speaker uses the analogy of a runner helping a fallen competitor to illustrate the essence of *parakalew* – prioritizing encouragement and support over personal gain.
- Examples from Paul's letters (Ephesians 6:22, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, 5:14) are used to further emphasize the consistent call for mutual encouragement and building up within the Christian community. "Encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing." (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

3. The Deceitfulness of Sin and the Hardening of the Heart:

- The passage warns against being "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." This is linked to the inherent deceptiveness of the human heart, referencing Jeremiah 17:9: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick. Who can understand it?"
- Paul's struggle with sin in Romans 7 is cited to illustrate the internal battle against sin and its power to lead us astray, even against our will. "For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing." (Romans 7:19).
- Daily encouragement is presented as a vital antidote to the hardening effect of sin's deceitfulness. "But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today'...." (NASB translation of Hebrews 3:13).

4. Practical Application:

- **Develop a Healthy Suspicion of Yourself:** Challenge the assumption that you always know yourself best and be open to the possibility of self-deception. Paul David Tripp is quoted: "Since sin is in its essence deceptive, as long as sin lives in our hearts, we will tend to be blind to the true condition of our hearts. But more must be said. Not only will we be blind to our hearts, but we will be blind to our blindness, thinking we see when we really don't." Robert Murray McCheyne's statement, "The seeds of every known sin

lay dormant in our hearts," encourages humility and awareness of our potential for wrongdoing.

- **Live Closely to Jesus and to Jesus' People:** Emphasize the necessity of both a personal relationship with Christ and active participation in a community of believers. The passage from Paul Trip reinforces the need for community: "The Hebrews passage clearly teaches that personal insight is a product of community. I need you in order to really see and know myself. Otherwise, I will listen to my own arguments, believe my own lies, and buy into my own delusions. My self-perception is as accurate as a carnival mirror. If I am going to see myself clearly, I need you to hold the mirror of God's Word in front of me."
- **Pursue a Relational Spirituality:** Move beyond superficial interactions and cultivate genuine vulnerability and authenticity within the Christian community. Brené Brown's observation about managing perception is contrasted with the freedom found in being real with one another. The "Cream Cheese Story" illustrates the value of having people in our lives who care enough to point out our flaws or blind spots.

Key Takeaway:

This study in Hebrews 3:12-13 strongly advocates for the indispensable role of daily mutual encouragement within the Christian community. By actively "exhorting one another," believers can combat the pervasive threat of self-deception, avoid being hardened by sin, and persevere in their faith journey together. This requires a conscious effort to move beyond a privatized faith and embrace the relational nature of Christian spirituality.