

<sup>1</sup>Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. <sup>2</sup>Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. <sup>3</sup>Continue 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... God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." – Heb. 13:1-3

God's promises are for us, but they are also for others. And many times God uses us to fulfill his promises to others.

One of the primary promises of scripture is of God's presence with us. In grief, in fear, in pain, and in depression, this promise is often what holds us together. "As hard and painful as this is, I can face it because God is with me," I hear all the time. In fact, when asked to list God's promises, the vast majority of Christians list this one first or even solely. This speaks to the familiarity of this promise in our hymnody, in our preaching, and in our common language. Because interestingly, this particular promise only shows up once in the New Testament, here in Hebrews. And only 4 other times in the Old Testament. There are other places where God's presence is promised or mentioned, but most think of this specific promise that "I will never leave you nor forsake you," and it only appears 5 times!

But take a look at what comes before it here in Hebrews. It is the call to us to BE God's presence for others. To love one another, show hospitality, show solidarity with strangers, those in prison, and those mistreated are all ways we show each other that God is truly present. And this is so important in our current global context.

Today we are once again protesting the mistreatment of our black brothers and sisters by this culture, and this verse certainly speaks directly to the black experience in America. As fellow Christians, we are called to love them "like brothers and sisters", and so their pain must be our pain and their fear our fear. If our siblings were facing what they have been facing for so long, we would fight for them, and so we must.

Sadly, in much of our white community, people of color are treated as strangers, not brothers and sisters. And yet even in the midst of that reality we are called to full hospitality. And in so doing, we ourselves can learn and be blessed. The disparity in our prison systems when it comes to race is obvious statistically and anecdotally, and we are called by God to identify with them in this, not excuse it or ignore it. And this goes for the mistreatment that has been a part of society and societies structures forever.

So, while we claim God's promise of His eternal presence for ourselves, we must also BE that presence for everyone, and especially for those who are treated as strangers, imprisoned and mistreated. I want to suggest you take a look at the [Covenant's LMDJ \("Love Mercy, Do Justice"\) Engage and Respond page here](#) and utilize some of the resources listed there. Read a book. Watch a movie. Have a conversation about this. And in so doing, begin to obey this passage beyond the promise we claim and forward to fulfilling this promise in the lives of our black family.