

The Book of Hebrews, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 5: A High Priest in the Order of Melchizedek

Hebrews 5:1-14

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson develops the high priesthood of Christ and introduces, for the first time, the mysterious figure of Melchizedek, which the writer will expand in chapter seven. The doctrinal heart of the passage is twofold. First, the qualifications of a true high priest, who must be appointed by God and able to represent the people, are perfectly met in Jesus, who was appointed by the Father and who entered fully into human weakness and suffering. Second, and looking ahead, the declaration that Christ is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek signals that His priesthood is of an entirely different and superior kind than the Levitical priesthood. The Aaronic priests were many, because death prevented them from continuing; Christ holds His priesthood permanently. This begins the writer's argument that the entire old priestly system is being replaced by something greater and final in Christ.

The passage also presses an important truth about salvation and obedience. Verse 9 says Christ became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. In a heritage that resists the idea of faith only, this verse is precious and clarifying. Salvation is indeed God's gracious gift, accomplished by Christ alone, yet it is received and retained by an obedient faith, never by mere mental assent. Help the class hold grace and obedience together as Scripture does, without collapsing either into the other.

Finally, the chapter carries a strong formational challenge. The readers had become dull of hearing and had stagnated, needing milk when they should have been ready for solid food. This is a call to spiritual maturity through practice and the training of discernment. Aim to send students home both comforted by the gentleness of their suffering high priest and challenged to stop coasting, to press on from the basics toward maturity in Christ.

Question 1

Student Question:

In verses 1 through 4 the writer describes what an Old Testament high priest was and did, chosen from among men, able to deal gently because of his own weakness, and called by God rather than self-appointed. What does this teach about the role and qualifications of a high priest?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Lay out the three features the writer names. A high priest is chosen from among men, so that he can truly represent people before God. His task is to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins, standing in the gap between a holy God and a sinful people. And because he himself is beset with weakness, he can deal gently with the ignorant and the wayward.

Note the qualification of calling in verse 4. No one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, as Aaron was. The priesthood is a divine appointment, not a human ambition. This guards against self-made religion and prepares for the point that Christ too was appointed by God.

Draw out the tenderness built into the office. The Old Testament priest had to offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as the people's, and that very weakness made him able to deal gently. The writer is setting up a comparison: Jesus shares our weakness and can deal gently with us, yet, as later verses show, without sin of His own. The role itself reveals what kind of mediator we need, one who represents us, atones for us, is appointed by God, and deals gently with us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The role of the high priest as mediator who offers sacrifices for sin.
- The qualification that a priest represents the people from among the people.
- The divine calling of the priesthood, not human ambition.
- The gentleness that comes from a priest who knows weakness.

Discussion Prompts

- Why must a high priest be chosen from among the people he represents?
- What does it mean that the priesthood is a calling, not a career?
- How does the gentleness of the office point us to the kind of Savior we need?

Question 2

Student Question:

The passage emphasizes that a true high priest can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward because he knows weakness himself. How does it comfort you to know that Jesus deals gently with you in your weakness, and where do you most need His gentleness right now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question invites students to receive the gentleness of Christ. The word the writer uses pictures a priest who can moderate his feelings, neither excusing sin nor crushing the sinner, dealing tenderly with those who are ignorant and going astray. This is how Jesus deals with us.

Many believers imagine God as perpetually disappointed or impatient with them, especially in areas of recurring weakness. This passage corrects that picture. Our high priest understands our frame and meets our weakness with gentleness, not contempt. He is the priest who breaks no bruised reed.

Invite students to bring a specific weakness into view, a struggle, a failure, an area where they feel perpetually behind. Encourage them to receive the gentleness of Christ there rather than hide from Him. His gentleness is not approval of sin but tender care for the weak who come to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gentleness of Christ toward the weak and wayward.
- The correction of a harsh or disappointed image of God.
- Receiving Christ's tenderness in specific areas of weakness.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the gentleness of Jesus differ from the way you often imagine God treats you?
- Where do you most need to receive His gentleness right now?
- How can His gentleness draw you toward Him rather than away?

Question 3

Student Question:

Verses 5 and 6 say that Christ did not exalt Himself to be a high priest but was appointed by the Father, who declared Him a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. What does this teach about how Jesus came to be our high priest and why that matters?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Stress the divine appointment. Just as no one took the office for himself under the old system, so Christ did not exalt Himself. The Father appointed Him, joining two declarations: You are my Son, from Psalm 2, and You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, from Psalm 110. The priesthood of Jesus rests on God's own word and choice.

Explain why this matters. Because Christ's priesthood is appointed by God, it carries divine authority and cannot be dismissed as a human invention. And because it is after the order of Melchizedek rather than Aaron, it is of a different and higher kind, a point the writer will develop fully in chapter seven.

Note the humility of the Son. Though He is the eternal Son, He did not grasp at the office but received it from the Father. This pattern of humble obedience runs through the whole passage and models the posture of all who serve God: receiving our place from Him rather than seizing it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The divine appointment of Christ to His priesthood.
- The joining of Sonship and priesthood in the Father's declaration.
- The Melchizedek order as a different and superior kind of priesthood.
- The humility of the Son in receiving rather than grasping His office.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it important that the Father, not Jesus Himself, appointed Him as priest?
- What is the significance of His priesthood being after the order of Melchizedek?
- How does the humility of the Son shape the way we approach service to God?

Question 4

Student Question:

Jesus did not grasp at honor but received His calling from the Father in humility. Where in your life are you tempted to exalt yourself or grasp for recognition, and what would it look like to receive your place from God instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the humility of Christ into self-examination. The Son, though fully worthy, did not exalt Himself but waited to receive His office from the Father. This stands in sharp contrast to the human instinct to grasp, to promote ourselves, and to crave recognition.

Help students locate the specific arenas where this instinct operates: at work, in the church, in family, on social media, in conversation. The desire to be noticed, credited, and admired is subtle and pervasive. Naming it honestly is the first step.

Point toward the alternative the text models. To receive our place from God is to trust that He assigns roles, opens doors, and grants honor in His time. It frees us from the exhausting work of self-promotion. Encourage one concrete way to lay down grasping this week and to serve from a settled identity given by God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The human tendency to grasp for recognition and self-exaltation.
- The example of Christ in receiving His place from the Father.
- Resting in a God-given identity rather than self-promotion.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you most tempted to grasp for recognition?
- What would it look like to receive your role and honor from God instead?
- How does the humility of Christ free you from the need to promote yourself?

Question 5

Student Question:

Verses 7 and 8 describe Jesus offering up prayers with loud cries and tears, and say that although He was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. What does this teach about the reality of Jesus' suffering and what He accomplished through it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Take the class into the reality of these verses, which point most clearly to Gethsemane. Jesus offered up prayers and pleas with loud cries and tears to the One able to save Him from death. This is no serene, untouched Savior. He agonized, He wept, He cried out. His humanity was real, and His suffering was real.

Explain carefully what it means that He learned obedience. It does not mean He moved from disobedience to obedience, for He was sinless. It means He experienced obedience in the crucible of suffering, learning by experience what it costs to obey when obedience is agony. He obeyed not in theory but in the hardest possible test.

Show what He accomplished. He was heard because of His reverence, and through this suffering He was made complete as our Savior and high priest. His tears were not weakness but the path along which He secured our salvation and became a priest who fully understands our trials. He sympathizes because He has truly suffered.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The genuine humanity and real suffering of Christ.
- The meaning of learning obedience through suffering, not from sin to obedience.
- The reverent submission of Christ in His agony.
- Christ's suffering as the path by which He became our sympathetic high priest.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the picture of Jesus crying out in prayer reveal about His humanity?
- How can the sinless Son learn obedience without ever having disobeyed?
- How does Jesus' suffering qualify Him to be your high priest?

Question 6

Student Question:

Consider Jesus in Gethsemane, crying out to God yet submitting to His will. When you face suffering or a hard obedience, what can you learn from the way Jesus prayed and surrendered?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question draws a pattern for prayer and obedience from the example of Christ. Notice that Jesus did not suppress His anguish or pretend to be unmoved. He brought His cries and tears honestly to the Father, asking that the cup pass, while still surrendering to the Father's will.

Help students see that honest lament and faithful submission can coexist. We do not have to choose between telling God how hard it is and trusting Him through it. Jesus did both. This frees believers from the false notion that real faith means hiding our pain.

Apply it to present suffering and hard obedience. When God calls us to a costly path, the way of Christ is to pour out our hearts honestly and then to say, not my will but yours be done.

Encourage students to bring a current hardship to God in exactly this way.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honest lament and faithful surrender held together in prayer.
- The example of Christ as the pattern for facing suffering.
- Obedience that trusts God even when it is costly.

Discussion Prompts

- What does Jesus teach you about being honest with God in suffering?
- How can you both pour out your heart and surrender to God's will?
- Where do you need to pray not my will but yours this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Verse 9 says that having been made perfect, Jesus became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. What does this teach about the connection between salvation and obedience, and how does it fit with salvation being a gift of grace?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Handle this important verse with care and clarity. The text says plainly that Christ is the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. Salvation and obedience are joined here, not as enemies but as friends. The salvation Christ provides is received and enjoyed by those who obey Him.

Guard against two errors. On one side is the idea that we earn salvation by our works, which Scripture denies; salvation is God's gift, accomplished entirely by Christ. On the other side is the idea of faith only, which would empty the word obey of meaning. This verse will not allow obedience to be optional. The faith that saves is an obedient faith.

Connect this to the consistent biblical pattern of response. The gospel calls us to believe in Jesus, to repent, to confess Him, and to be baptized into Him, and then to walk in faithful obedience. None of this earns salvation; all of it is the God-appointed way of receiving and continuing in the salvation Christ alone provides. Grace and obedience are not rivals. Grace teaches us to obey, and obedient faith lays hold of grace.

Help students feel the warmth of this. To obey Christ is not a burden imposed on the saved but the glad response of those who trust Him. The same Jesus who suffered to save us calls us to follow Him, and in following we find the salvation He is the source of.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Salvation as the gracious gift of God, accomplished by Christ alone.
- The necessity of an obedient faith, against the idea of faith only.
- The harmony of grace and obedience in receiving salvation.
- The biblical pattern of response: believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized, then walking faithfully.

Discussion Prompts

- How does this verse guard against the idea of faith only?
- How does it also guard against thinking we earn our salvation?
- What does it look like to obey Christ as a glad response to grace?

Question 8

Student Question:

The writer says his readers had become dull of hearing and sluggish. What are the warning signs of spiritual dullness in a believer's life, and which of them do you recognize in yourself?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question helps students diagnose spiritual dullness. The writer says his readers had become dull of hearing, sluggish, needing milk when they should be ready for solid food. Dullness is not loss of faith outright but a slow loss of appetite, attentiveness, and growth.

Help the class name the symptoms: boredom with God's word, prayer that has gone cold, an inability to teach or help others, a faith that has not deepened in years, a hunger only for the simplest comforts and never the harder truths. These are signs that growth has stalled.

Encourage honest self-recognition without despair. The writer's rebuke is loving, aimed at people with real potential who have coasted. Naming the dullness is the first step toward renewed appetite. Ask each person which symptom they most recognize and what might rekindle their hunger.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The marks of spiritual dullness and stalled growth.
- The difference between losing faith and losing appetite.
- Honest self-diagnosis as the path back to growth.

Discussion Prompts

- What are the signs that a believer has become dull of hearing?
- Which of those signs do you recognize in your own life?
- What might rekindle your appetite for the deeper things of God?

Question 9

Student Question:

Verses 5, 6, and 10 declare that Jesus is a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, appointed by God Himself, unlike the temporary Levitical priests who died and were replaced. Why is it significant that Jesus holds a different and permanent kind of priesthood, and what does this begin to teach about Christ replacing the old priestly system entirely?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson, so set it up well and connect it to the larger argument of Hebrews. The writer repeatedly anchors Christ's priesthood not in the line of Aaron but in the order of Melchizedek, citing Psalm 110:4. This is deliberate and significant, because it signals that Christ's priesthood is of an entirely different kind than the Levitical one.

Spell out the contrast the writer is building toward. The Levitical priests were many, descended from Aaron, serving for a time and then dying, so that the office passed from one to the next. Their work was repeated endlessly and could never finally take away sin. Christ, by contrast, is a priest forever. He does not die and pass the office on. His priesthood is permanent, held by the living and risen Son of God.

Show what this begins to teach. If God appointed a new and different priesthood in Christ, then the old priesthood was not the final arrangement. A change of priesthood implies a change of the whole system, as the writer will argue explicitly in chapter seven. The Levitical priesthood, with its repeated sacrifices, was a shadow pointing forward to the one eternal priest who would offer one perfect sacrifice and live forever to intercede. Christ does not merely supplement the old system; He fulfills and replaces it.

Draw out the assurance for believers. Because our high priest lives forever, our salvation rests on a priest who never dies, never fails, and never needs replacing. The permanence of His priesthood is the permanence of our hope. Where the old system left worshipers always waiting for the next sacrifice, Christ's once-for-all, ever-living priesthood gives us a Savior who always lives to intercede for us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ's priesthood after the order of Melchizedek as a different and superior kind.
- The contrast between the many dying Levitical priests and the one eternal priest.
- The beginning of the argument that Christ replaces the entire old priestly system.
- The permanence of Christ's priesthood as the ground of our assurance.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the writer ground Christ's priesthood in Melchizedek rather than Aaron?
- What does the permanence of Christ's priesthood mean for your security?
- How does a change of priesthood point to a change of the whole old system?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole chapter. The writer holds together the tender high priest who suffered for us and the call to grow up into maturity. Name one specific way you will draw on the gentleness of Christ and one specific way you will press on toward maturity this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone joins the chapter's two notes, comfort and challenge, and asks for a response in both directions. The same chapter that shows us a gentle, suffering high priest also rebukes spiritual coasting. Both belong together in a healthy walk.

Help students name one way to draw on Christ's gentleness, perhaps bringing a specific weakness or failure to Him rather than hiding, and one way to press toward maturity, perhaps taking up a harder truth, beginning to teach or serve others, or renewing a neglected discipline.

Close by returning to the chapter's vision. Our high priest suffered to save us and deals gently with us, and He calls us to grow up into the maturity for which He saved us. Send students home both comforted and challenged, leaning on His gentleness as they press on toward maturity.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Drawing on the gentleness of Christ in our weakness.
- Pressing on from spiritual infancy toward maturity.
- The healthy union of comfort and challenge in Christian growth.

Discussion Prompts

- How will you draw on the gentleness of Christ this week?
- What is one concrete step toward maturity you can take?
- What has been keeping you from growing, and how will you address it?