

# THE LOOKOUT

NOVEMBER 2021

**Unit: HEBREWS (Part 3)**  
**Theme: FAITH**

**Overview:** If Jesus is superior to everyone and everything (September lessons), and if he is the ultimate high priest who can connect us to God (October lessons), then our best response is to place all our faith in him. *Faith*, Bible writers testify, is appropriating God’s grace for our lives. During this unit, students will learn how to hold firm in their faith, grow up in faith, persevere in faith, and be known among the faithful.

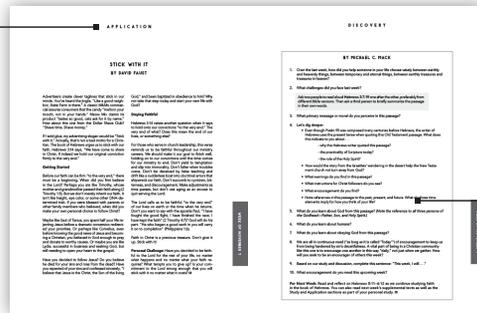
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



**Tabs** indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 14, 2021

**LESSON AIM:** **“Show . . . diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized.”**

**UNIT:** Hebrews (Part 3)

**THEME:** Faith

**LESSON TEXT:** Hebrews 5:11–6:12

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23; 2 Peter 1:3-10

## STUDY

### GROW UP

BY MARK SCOTT

God expects things to grow. He wants crops (Mark 4:26-29), families (Genesis 1:28; 12:3), churches (Acts 2:47; 14:1), and individual believers (2 Peter 3:18) to grow. In fact, when things do not grow, something is drastically wrong (Luke 13:6-9). There is nothing wrong with feeding an infant in a high chair. But if that infant has turned 17 and he's still being fed in a high chair, something isn't right.

Ongoing growth was a challenge for the Hebrew Christians. They were being tempted to compare lesser people or things with Jesus (e.g., angels, priesthoods, covenants, or Moses). They were being lured back to the practices of Judaism. They were being persecuted for their faith. Christian maturity was not a given. The writer stepped aside from an argument about the priesthood of Jesus being superior to the Aaronic priesthood and like the priesthood of Melchizedek (Hebrews 4:14-5:10; 6:13-7:28) and inserted this aside to exhort people to Christian maturity (5:11-6:12).

#### Metaphors in the Text

The Hebrew writer used several metaphors to encourage readers to "grow up." The first was *milk*. Every infant wants and needs milk. But solid food must be introduced at some point. The Hebrew believers were immature, so certain matters of the faith were *hard* (i.e., hermeneutically difficult) to understand. It was time to be teachers. Instead, these immature believers were still learning the *elementary truths* of the faith. The word *elementary* was a favorite term of the ancient Greek philosophers. It dealt with the basic elements of the universe (e.g., earth, water, air, and fire). In effect, the Hebrew writer was saying they were still learning the ABCs of the faith. Only as they grew in *righteousness* would they be able to *distinguish good from evil*.

The second metaphor was *foundation*. Good builders lay a foundation just once. In Christian terms, that foundation consisted of repentance, faith, *cleansing rites* (literally "baptisms," but think of the priests using the laver), resurrection from the dead (which the Old Testament did not discuss at length), and *eternal judgment*. The Old Testament laid the foundation, but it was not the house itself.

The third metaphor was *taste*. The psalmist wrote, "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8). To "taste" here means to ingest salvation. The heavenly *gift* (the same word used in Acts 2:38) is the salvation experienced when the Holy Ghost becomes our "holy guest." God's glorious future (*the powers of the coming age*) had invaded the present.

The fourth metaphor was *land*. Thirsty soil laps up rain, and then crops grow. But dry ground (especially fallen earth) produced *thorns and thistles* (Genesis 3:18) that will be *burned* at the final judgment. The writer used any helpful metaphor to call readers to grow.

#### The Elephant in the Room

The issue of eternal security (also known as once-saved-always-saved or the perseverance of the saints) obviously is the elephant in the room. Can salvation be lost? Some suggest that the people in the text had simply made a "profession" of faith but fell short of having real faith. Others suggest that the writer was giving a hypothetical example of losing one's salvation to encourage his readers to grow. Still others believe the passage speaks not about losing one's salvation but being disqualified from further service to God. Finally, some believe that salvation, once embraced, can be given back—a view that does not threaten God's sovereignty but does break his heart. God-loving, Bible-believing, and Jesus-honoring people disagree about this.

Indeed, there are Bible passages that, at first pass, do seem to indicate that one cannot lose salvation (John 10:28; Romans 8:29-30; 1 Peter 1:4-5). Dare we doubt God's ability to save us to the uttermost? Is God so capricious with us that we end up hopping in and out of his grace daily, dependent on our mere human obedience? Can we even know if we are saved or is it just a roll of the dice (1 John 5:13)? Is there no such thing as assurance of salvation?

It partly comes down to nomenclature. You can lose your car keys and your cell phone, but can you "lose" your salvation? What if we changed the wording to "surrender"? Can we, after we have embraced the faith, surrender it back to God? Hebrews 6:4-6 and 9-12 would seem to indicate we can. One can go down a path of no return (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12). One can fall away from grace and still be restored (Galatians 5:4). But in this text one can be *fallen away* (the Greek word in Hebrews 6:6 is different from the one in Galatians 5:4) from grace and it is impossible to restore such a one. Not only that, but the last paragraph of our text indicates that God would not forget their work and love, but they must show constant diligence to *inherit what has been promised*.

No matter on which side one lines up, Christian growth is the best assurance of staying as far away from apostasy as possible. ■

## APPLICATION

### FIVE STEPS TOWARD SPIRITUAL GROWTH

BY DAVID FAUST

A little boy fell out of bed. When his mother asked what happened, he said, "I guess I stayed too close to where I got in." Sometimes Christians do that, too. Instead of maturing, they stay spiritually stagnant and stuck. Someone quipped, "You're only young once, but it's possible to stay immature indefinitely!"

Here are five disciplines the Lord uses to help us grow.

1. *We grow by stretching.* The body of Christ needs to stretch, just like our physical bodies. After we sit for a while, it's good to stretch our limbs, and the same is true with our faith. Our relationship with God deepens when we tackle new challenges, increase our giving, and step outside our comfort zones.

2. *We grow by studying.* "By this time you ought to be teachers" (Hebrews 5:12), but to lead others well, we must be lifelong learners ourselves, studying the Bible to understand the mind of God and studying culture to understand our ministry environment. Every Christian should *be a student* and *have a student*. Whether you're a brand-new believer or you've been following Jesus for 40 years, you can learn from those ahead of you and help others who follow you.

3. *We grow by serving*—getting our hands dirty and helping people. There comes a time when members of the family shouldn't just sit back and enjoy eating the meal; we should help cook the food and wash the dishes afterward. The same is true in the church. If you enjoy being part of a small group, when will you host or lead a group? If you drop your kids off at church and let someone else take care of them, when will you dive in and volunteer with the kids' ministry yourself? Give, and you receive. Serve, and your faith will grow.

4. *We grow by struggling.* Everyone wants to reach the mountaintop, but have you ever been on top of a mountain? Not a lot grows up there! Mountaintops provide perspective and vision, but they can be cold and barren. Things grow better down in the valley's fertile soil. Before turning into a butterfly, a caterpillar struggles to emerge from its cocoon. If you step in and open the cocoon prematurely, you're not doing the caterpillar a favor. The struggle within a cocoon forces fluid into the butterfly's wings. We grow more from facing adversity than from enjoying prosperity. "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11).

5. *We grow by sacrificing.* Selfishness is a mark of immaturity. God's love leads us to lay down our lives for others. Remember when you were a child and your parents taught you to share? Hebrews 13:16 says, "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

Some men in my church were discussing the question, "What was the first thing you were taught when you became a Christian?" One answered, "I learned to pray." Someone else responded, "I memorized the books of the Bible in order." A new believer replied, "I learned that we should love others as Jesus did."

"Knowledge puffs up while love builds up" (1 Corinthians 8:1). That's a lesson we should never outgrow.

**Personal Challenge:** Name one area of your life in which you have experienced spiritual growth over the last year. What spurred you to grow in this way? Name one area of your life where you remain immature. What step will you take to grow more like Christ in this area? ■

## DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. How specifically did you encourage others last week (and what impact do you think that made)?
2. What encouragement did you need (and receive) over the past week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Hebrews 5:11–6:12** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to summarize the passage in a minute or less. .

3. As you read or listened to this passage, what major theme(s) emerged?
4. Let's dig deeper:
  - Before and after the passage we're studying today, the writer discussed a theological point about Jesus' priesthood in the order of Melchizedek being superior to the Aaronic priesthood. How might that explain the aside he took to address concerns about the Hebrews' maturity?
  - Look at the comparisons in this passage (note that some of the comparisons are assumed): learners/teachers, milk/solid food, foundation/house, unproductive land/productive land. What do these comparisons teach you?
  - How does raising children from dependent infants to independent adults illustrate our spiritual growth?
  - What warnings does the writer give to people who remain in their spiritual immaturity and don't grow up?
  - What encouragement does the writer give to the Hebrew believers who do move forward in spiritual maturity and then also bear fruit?
  - What promises do you see for maturing Christ followers?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. What is your next step of obedience in moving forward to spiritual maturity?
8. Hebrews 5:12 says, "You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others" (*New Living Translation*). In what ways does this spur you on to step up to lead more in this group (or elsewhere) or take a few others with you to start a new group?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. In what area of your life will you need more faith and/or patience for this week?

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Hebrews 10:19-39** as we continue studying faith in the book of Hebrews. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■