

THE LOOKOUT

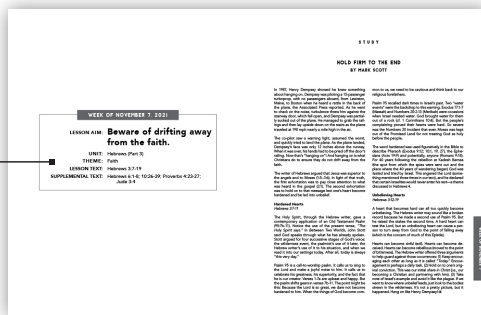
NOVEMBER 2021

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.

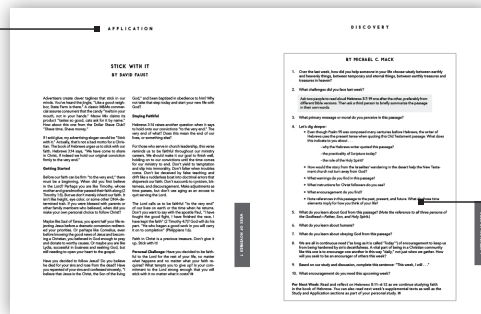
HOW TO USE

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 7, 2021

LESSON AIM: **Beware of drifting away
from the faith.**

UNIT: Hebrews (Part 3)

THEME: Faith

LESSON TEXT: Hebrews 3:7-19

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Hebrews 6:1-8; 10:26-39; Proverbs 4:23-27;
Jude 3-4

HOLD FIRM TO THE END

BY MARK SCOTT

In 1987, Henry Dempsey showed he knew something about hanging on. Dempsey was piloting a 15-passenger turboprop, with no passengers aboard, from Lewiston, Maine, to Boston when he heard a rattle in the back of the plane, the Associated Press reported. As he went to check on the noise, turbulence threw him against the stairway door, which fell open, and Dempsey was partially sucked out of the plane. He managed to grab the railings and then lay upside down on the stairs as the plane traveled at 190 mph nearly a mile high in the air.

The co-pilot saw a warning light, assumed the worst, and quickly tried to land the plane. As the plane landed, Dempsey's face was only 12 inches above the runway. When it was over, his hands had to be pried off the door's railing. Now that's "hanging on"! And hanging on is what Christians do to ensure they do not drift away from the faith.

The writer of Hebrews argued that Jesus was superior to the angels and to Moses (1:5–3:6). In light of that truth, the first exhortation was to pay close attention to what was heard in the gospel (2:1). The second exhortation was to hold on to that message lest one's heart become hardened and be led into unbelief.

Hardened Hearts

Hebrews 3:7-11

The Holy Spirit, through the Hebrew writer, gave a contemporary application of an Old Testament Psalm (95:7b-11). Notice the use of the present tense, "*The Holy Spirit says.*" In *Between Two Worlds*, John Stott said God speaks through what he has already spoken. Stott argued for four successive stages of God's voice: the wilderness event, the psalmist's use of it later, the Hebrew writer's use of it to his situation, and when we read it into our settings today. After all, *today* is always "this very day."

Psalm 95 is a call-to-worship psalm. It calls us to sing to the Lord and make a joyful noise to him. It calls us to celebrate his greatness, his superiority, and the fact that he is our creator. Verses 1-7a are upbeat and happy. But the psalm shifts gears in verses 7b-11. The point might be this: Because the Lord is so great, we dare not become hardened to him. When the things of God become com-

mon to us, we need to be cautious and think back to our religious forefathers.

Psalm 95 recalled dark times in Israel's past. Two "water events" were the backdrop to this warning. Exodus 17:1-7 (Massah) and Numbers 20:2-13 (Meribah) were occasions when Israel needed water. God brought water for them out of a rock (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:4). But the people's complaining proved their hearts were hard. So severe was the Numbers 20 incident that even Moses was kept out of the Promised Land for not treating God as holy before the people.

The word *hardened* was used figuratively in the Bible to describe Pharaoh (Exodus 9:12; 10:1, 19, 27), the Ephesians (Acts 19:9) and potentially, anyone (Romans 9:18). For 40 years following the *rebellion* at Kadesh Barnea (the spot from which the spies were sent out and the place where the 40 years of wandering began) God was *tested and tried* by Israel. This angered the Lord (something mentioned three times in our text), and he declared that certain Israelites would *never enter his rest*—a theme discussed in Hebrews 4.

Unbelieving Hearts

Hebrews 3:12-19

A heart that becomes hard can all too quickly become unbelieving. The Hebrew writer may sound like a broken record because he made a second use of Psalm 95. But he raised the stakes the second time. A hard heart can test the Lord, but an unbelieving heart can cause a person to turn away from God to the point of falling away (which is the concern of much of this Epistle).

Hearts can become *sinful* (evil). Hearts can become deceived. Hearts can become rebellious (moved to the point of bitterness). The Hebrew writer offered three arguments to help guard against those occurrences: (1) Keep encouraging each other *as long as it is called "Today."* Encouragement is perhaps a daily task. (2) Hold on to one's original conviction. This was our initial *share in Christ* (i.e., our becoming a Christian and partnering with him). (3) Take note of Israel's example and avoid it like the plague. If we want to know where unbelief leads, just look to the bodies strewn in the wilderness. It's not a pretty picture, but it happened. Hang on like Henry Dempsey! **L**

STICK WITH IT

BY DAVID FAUST

Advertisers create clever taglines that stick in our minds. You've heard the jingle, "Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there." A classic M&Ms commercial assures consumers that the candy "melts in your mouth, not in your hands." Meow Mix claims its product "tastes so good, cats ask for it by name." How about this one from the Dollar Shave Club? "Shave time. Shave money."

If I sold glue, my advertising slogan would be "Stick with it." Actually, that's not a bad motto for a Christian. The book of Hebrews urges us to stick with our faith. Hebrews 3:14 says, "We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end."

Getting Started

Before our faith can be firm "to the very end," there must be a beginning. When did you first believe in the Lord? Perhaps you are like Timothy, whose mother and grandmother passed their faith along (2 Timothy 1:5). But we don't merely inherit our faith. It isn't like height, eye color, or some other DNA-determined trait. If you were blessed with parents or other family members who believed, when did you make your own personal choice to follow Christ?

Maybe like Saul of Tarsus, you spent half your life rejecting Jesus before a dramatic conversion redirected your priorities. Or perhaps like Cornelius, even before knowing the good news of Jesus and becoming a Christian, you believed in God enough to pray and donate to worthy causes. Or maybe you are like Lydia, successful in business and seeking God, but still needing to open your heart to the gospel.

Have you decided to follow Jesus? Do you believe he died for your sins and rose from the dead? Have you repented of your sins and confessed sincerely, "I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living

God," and been baptized in obedience to him? Why not take that step today and start your new life with God?

Staying Faithful

Hebrews 3:14 raises another question when it says to hold onto our convictions "to the very end." The very end of what? Does this mean the end of our lives, or something else?

For those who serve in church leadership, this verse reminds us to be faithful throughout our ministry careers. We should make it our goal to finish well, holding on to our convictions until the time comes for our ministry to end. Don't yield to temptation and slip into immorality. Don't falter when troubles come. Don't be deceived by false teaching and drift like a rudderless boat into doctrinal errors that shipwreck our faith. Don't succumb to cynicism, bitterness, and discouragement. Make adjustments as time passes, but don't use aging as an excuse to quit serving the Lord.

The Lord calls us to be faithful "to the very end" of our lives on earth or the time when he returns. Don't you want to say with the apostle Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7)? God will do his part. "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion" (Philippians 1:6).

Faith in Christ is a precious treasure. Don't give it up. Stick with it!

Personal Challenge: Have you decided to be faithful to the Lord for the rest of your life, no matter what happens and no matter what your faith requires? What tempts you to give up? Is your commitment to the Lord strong enough that you will stick with it no matter what it costs? **L**

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. Over the last week, how did you help someone in your life choose wisely between earthly and heavenly things, between temporary and eternal things, between earthly treasures and treasures in heaven?
2. What challenges did you face last week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Hebrews 3:7-19** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage in their own words.

3. What primary message or moral do you perceive in this passage?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - Even though Psalm 95 was composed many centuries before Hebrews, the writer of Hebrews uses the present tense when quoting this Old Testament passage. What does this indicate to you about . . .
 - why the Hebrews writer quoted this passage?
 - the practicality of Scripture today?
 - the role of the Holy Spirit?
 - How would the story from the Israelites' wandering in the desert help the New Testament church not turn away from God?
 - What warnings do you find in this passage?
 - What instructions for Christ followers do you see?
 - What encouragement do you find?
 - Note references in this passage to the past, present, and future. What do those time elements imply for how you think of your life?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage? (*Note the reference to all three persons of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*)
6. What do you learn about humans?
7. What do you learn about obeying God from this passage?
8. We are all in continuous need ("as long as it is called 'Today'") of encouragement to keep us from being hardened by sin's deceitfulness. A vital part of being in a Christian community like this one is to encourage one another in this way "daily," not just when we gather. How will you seek to be an encourager of others this week?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What encouragement do you need this upcoming week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Hebrews 5:11–6:12** 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. ■