



# 1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

## OVERVIEW

### Study: 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.

# INTRODUCTION

## Author

Hebrews does not name its author. Parts of the letter sound like Paul, but other parts do not, and early Christians suggested Barnabas, Apollos, Luke, and others. The early church scholar Origen concluded that only God knows who wrote it. The writer knew Timothy (Hebrews 13:23) and received the gospel from those who heard the Lord (2:3).

## Audience

The letter seems to have been written for Jewish Christians who knew the Old Testament well and were tempted to drift away from Christ and return to Judaism (Hebrews 2:1; 10:35-39). They had endured persecution in the past (10:32-34). The writer called his letter “my word of exhortation” (13:22).

## Date

Hebrews likely was written before the destruction of the temple in AD 70, since the writer speaks of the priests and sacrifices as still continuing (Hebrews 10:1-2, 11). Many scholars date it in the 60s AD.

## Setting

The readers lived in a world shaped by the Mosaic law, the priesthood, and the sacrifices. Some had grown weary and were in danger of shrinking back under pressure. The greeting from “those from Italy” (Hebrews 13:24) suggests a connection to Rome, either as the place of writing or the home of the readers.

## Theme

Faith is the fitting response to a superior Savior. Because Jesus is greater than angels, Moses, and the Old Covenant priests, believers must not drift away, harden their hearts, or “shrink back” (Hebrews 10:39). Instead they are called to hold their original conviction firmly to the very end (3:14), grow into maturity (6:1), persevere (10:36), and run the race marked out for them, fixing their eyes on Jesus, “the pioneer and perfecter of faith” (12:1-2).

## Why Study Hebrews?

Hebrews calls believers to beware of drifting away from the faith, to show diligence to the very end so that what they hope for may be fully realized, to persevere rather than shrink back, and to join the great cloud of witnesses by putting their faith into action.

## STUDY CONTENT

**WEEK 1:** Hebrews 3:7-19

**WEEK 2:** Hebrews 5:11–6:12

**WEEK 3:** Hebrews 10:19-39

**WEEK 4:** Hebrews 11:1-6, 30-40; 12:1-3

## WEEK ONE

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

**STUDY:** 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 common 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!

*Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.*

## 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?

*David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.*

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

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.

## WEEK TWO

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

**STUDY:** 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

## 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.

*Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.*

## 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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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).

**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?

*David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.*

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

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.

### WEEK THREE

**LESSON AIM:** **Be careful not to “shrink back” in your faith but to persevere.**

**STUDY:** Hebrews (Part 3)

**THEME:** Faith

**LESSON TEXT:** Hebrews 10:19-39

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Isaiah 55:6-7; 1 Timothy 6:11-16

## PERSEVERE IN FAITH

BY MARK SCOTT

On July 30, 2020, NASA launched a land rover to Mars. They rightly named it *Perseverance*. After all, it was a long journey. Perseverance always takes “the long cut,” and sometimes that journey is hard. That is why perseverance is defined as “doing something despite difficulty.” People of faith know it is always too soon to quit.

After spending significant time and space describing why the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant—particularly how the New Covenant works (Hebrews 8:1–10:18), the writer gives what some call the fourth major exhortation of the Epistle. It is clearly a call to never give up.

**The Impetus for Perseverance***Hebrews 10:19–25*

In this paragraph the writer reviews the basis for perseverance and announces the “superior realities” of the New Covenant that make perseverance possible. *Confidence* (boldness) to enter salvation is not based on anything we have done, but on what Christ has done through his blood. Verse 20 functions as an appositional phrase (i.e., it further describes what is meant by Jesus entering the Most Holy Place). The *curtain* (veil) in the New Covenant is not a literal veil in the temple (cf. Mark 15:38). It stands for access to God and is described as a *new and living way*. This is something for which to give thanks this week.

Based on God’s activity in Christ, we enter the “let us” patch of Hebrews. Three imperatives come out of this impetus. Believers are commanded to *draw near* to God, *hold unswervingly* to hope, and *consider* how to spur on one another in love and good deeds. Drawing near is possible due to the salvific work of Christ which is embraced through having our hearts cleansed in baptism (i.e., having *bodies washed with pure water*). Holding unswervingly to hope is possible through our confession of faith and God’s faithfulness. Considering how to *spur* (poke or prod) others on toward love and good deeds is possible because we have the motivation of the *Day* (judgment) approaching. And the best way to spur others on is not to neglect the church assembly.

**A Caution Against Not Persevering***Hebrews 10:26–31*

This paragraph contains one of the sharpest rebukes in the Epistle. Not to grow is to regress. Not to persevere is something on the order of high treason. Deliberate sin after receiving knowledge of the truth negates the power of the cross. The only thing that remains then is judgment from God that his enemies will receive.

The writer uses the common “how much more” argument. If the people in Moses’ day did not persevere and therefore

received God’s judgment (based on the typical two or three witness protocol), how much more will people who have embraced Christ and turned back be judged. They essentially have *trampled the Son of God underfoot*. It is as if they have crucified Jesus again. They have regarded the blood of Christ as something common, and they have *insulted the Spirit of grace* (i.e., taken undue advantage of grace and presumed on God; cf. Romans 2:4). Judgment should be left in God’s hands, and believers should be careful of falling into these forms of ungodliness.

**A Challenge to Persevering***Hebrews 10:32–35*

There are many challenges to persevering, but this paragraph focuses on the external challenge of persecution. These Hebrew Christians had endured much. If they turned back (spoken of as “throwing away their confidence”) it would negate why they had endured persecution in the past.

This suffering showed up in four ways. They were verbally *insulted* (reviled or upbraided). They were “persecuted” (pressed down). They were put in prison (cf. Hebrews 13:3). Finally, they had their property *confiscated* (seized with force). This last challenge could be laughed at by the believers. They understood that all property belonged to God anyway and that they had lasting possessions in heaven. They might have items taken in this world but they would be richly rewarded in the next world (cf. Mark 10:29–31).

**The Promise to Those Who Persevered***Hebrews 10:36–39*

The promise was already more than hinted at in the previous paragraph. In these verses the believers’ vindication and reward were undergirded by Old Testament texts. To *persevere* (faithfully “remain under”) by habitually doing the will of God guaranteed receiving God’s promises.

The writer used a cluster of Old Testament passages (i.e., he used lines from them to frame up his argument but did not quote them exactly). They were Isaiah 26:21; Haggai 2:6; and Habakkuk 2:3–4. The argument: God’s judgment will come, God’s people must walk by faith (illustrated in the following chapter), and God delights in people who hang in there. “Shrinking back” is to draw back or defect. It is the opposite of perseverance. It is apostasy.

Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.

## THREE CRUCIAL COMMITMENTS

BY DAVID FAUST

The book of Hebrews contains 13 chapters, and the word *better* appears 13 times in the most literal translations of the book. Christ is better than the angels. He's greater than Old Testament heroes like Moses and Joshua. He offers more satisfying rest, better promises, and greater empathy. He brings a new and better covenant. When we are discouraged and feel like giving up, the book of Hebrews urges us to take the better way and persevere.

To be fair, there are times when it's OK to quit. Dr. Henry Cloud's book *Necessary Endings* explains that we shouldn't feel guilty for setting boundaries or leaving a job that's not the right fit. But Hebrews 10 confronts us with three crucial commitments we should never give up. The author highlights these points by repeating the phrase "let us."

### Don't Give Up on God

Hebrews 10:22 says, "Let us draw near to God." Moses drew near to God on Mount Sinai, but the rest of the people were told not to approach the mountain or even to touch it, on penalty of death (see Exodus 19:12). The message then wasn't "draw near to God." It was "keep your distance."

On Mount Calvary, though, God opened his arms and invited us into his presence. "We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus" (Hebrews 10:19). Why push God away when he has gone to such great lengths to pull you close?

### Don't Give Up Hope

The phrase "let us" appears again in Hebrews 10:23, which says, "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope that we profess, for he who promised is faithful." In stormy times, hope is "an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (Hebrews 6:19). Our hope is grounded in the rock-solid words of Jesus, who promised that if we believe in him, we will live even though we die (John 11:25). Our hope is further guaranteed by Jesus' resurrection, for God's power at work in us "is the same as the mighty strength

he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead" (Ephesians 1:19-20).

The older I get, the more I think about and talk about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I can barely contain my excitement about the greatest comeback in the history of the world! Simon Peter never lost his enthusiasm about it. He wrote, "In his great mercy [God] has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3).

### Don't Give Up on the Church

The phrase "let us" appears again in Hebrews 10:24, which says, "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." The word translated "spur" literally meant to "needle" or "provoke." Like cowboys who spur their horses to go faster, Christians should motivate each other to love and serve well.

Are you growing weary in well-doing? Have your spurs worn down and lost their edge? Have you been around long enough to recognize the church's many flaws and shortcomings? The body of Christ is comprised of imperfect people who serve a perfect Lord. Can you see past the blemishes on Jesus' bride and glimpse the glory of what she can be and will be?

"God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them" (Hebrews 6:10). Don't give up!

### Personal Challenge:

In your walk with the Lord, where are you right now on a scale of 1 ("exhausted and empty") to 10 ("full of faith and zeal")? Ask God to refresh your faith, rekindle your spiritual fervor, and help you persevere.

*David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.*

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How specifically did you step up in your faith or forward toward leading others last week?
2. Over the past week, how did God provide you with the faith and/or patience you needed?

Ask two people to read aloud **Hebrews 10:19-39** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to provide a summary of the passage.

3. How does this passage as a whole encourage you to persevere in your faith?
4. Let's dig deeper:
  - Why can we have confidence (boldness) to come into God's presence?
  - What reasons do you see in this passage to persevere in your faith?
  - How can we as a community of Christ followers be involved in helping one another to keep going?
  - How does baptism provide us with assurance and perseverance?
  - Several sentences begin with the words "Let us" (in the *New International Version*). What do these imperative statements encourage us to do as we persevere in our faith?
  - What warnings are given to believers for persevering in our faith?
  - What challenges and encouragements are given to help us keep going?
  - How can remembering times of suffering and persecution help us to persevere in our faith?
  - How can maintaining a Christian worldview help us to persevere in the face of difficult circumstances? (See especially vv. 32-39.)
  - What promises are given to those who believe and keep going in their faith?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. Choose one of the following three imperatives from this passage that you will focus on obeying this week:
  - Draw near to God
  - Hold unswervingly to the hope you profess
  - Spur on others toward love and good deeds, encouraging them
 What specific actions will you take this week to obey this message to you from God's Word?
8. How might persevering in your faith provide opportunities for you to share the gospel (vv. 19-20) with others?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. This week, as you reflect on the promises and encouragements (and even the warnings) from this passage, for what will you give God thanks?

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Hebrews 11:1-6, 30-40; 12:1-3** 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.

## WEEK FOUR

**LESSON AIM:** **Determine to put your faith into action.**

**STUDY:** Hebrews (Part 3)

**THEME:** Faith

**LESSON TEXT:** Hebrews 11:1-6, 30-40; 12:1-3

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Hebrews 11:7-29

## JOIN THE RANKS OF THE FAITHFUL

BY MARK SCOTT

Sports figures look to former great athletes (like Michael Jordan) for inspiration. Doctors look to former medical personnel (like Alexander Fleming, who discovered penicillin) to build on their discoveries. Inventors look to former inventors (like Thomas Edison) for motivation to keep trying. Christians look to their faithful forebears to receive what has been promised by God.

The writer of Hebrews encouraged readers not to give up, to look to faithful examples, and to consider Jesus. Therein we can join the ranks of the faithful. Twila Paris sings, “Come and join the reapers, all the kingdom seekers . . . for the Lord is calling faithful men.”

### The Faithful Understand Faith’s Description and Importance

*Hebrews 11:1-6*

Many people use Hebrews 11:1 as a definition for faith. After all, the word “is” is in the verse. But what kind of “is” is it? The word *faith* does not mean *confidence* (that which undergirds) and *assurance* (refutes adversaries). Perhaps the “is” is more descriptive than definitive. What follows in the chapter are certainly not definitions as much as examples. These examples are from the *ancients* (elders). They were *commended* (the Greek word is *martureō*, and it appears several times in this text).

One event and two people were immediately mentioned. The event was creation. The *universe* (age) was made by particles that cannot be seen. Faith is necessary to appreciate that. The two ancients were Abel (in contrast with Cain) and Enoch. Abel’s offering was better and spoken well of by God—evidently because it was offered in faith. Enoch walked with God and did not experience death (Genesis 4–5). Others mentioned in our lesson text include Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob/Esau, the sons of Joseph, Moses, and the people of the Exodus.

The importance of faith is seen in Hebrews 11:6. Faith pleases God. The one who has it will believe that he exists and that he rewards people who search for him.

### The Faithful Are Commended for Looking Forward

*Hebrews 11:30-40*

The writer’s list of the faithful continues. Some surprises are on the list. We learn of the people of the conquest

(Joshua’s era). We learn of the judges—Gideon (who started well but ended with some arrogance), Barak (who needed lots of help from Deborah), Samson (who was something of a playboy but judged Israel for 20 years and must have done some good things), Jephthah (who was presumptuous with a vow), David, Samuel, and the prophets. The commended are reviewed with what we might call “compressed narratives.” They *conquered kingdoms, administered (worked) justice, . . . shut the mouths of lions* (Daniel 6), *quenched the fury of the flames* (Daniel 3), *escaped the edge of the sword . . . and routed foreign armies*. They were all examples of God turning weakness to strength.

The writer mentioned the good things the commended did as well as the things they endured. They endured death (some were raised from the dead—1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:18-37); they endured *torture* (as in the tightening of drum strings); they endured jeering, floggings, chains, prison, stoning, martyrdom, and many other heinous things. Indeed, the world was not worthy of them. But they were commended for their faith because they looked beyond the present. The implied message for the Hebrews was this: Why would you go back when you have what the ancients could only hope for?

### The Faithful One

*Hebrews 12:1-3*

As the Epistle moved into the final applications, the writer offered one more look at Jesus. The supreme example of walking by faith was Jesus himself. The Hebrews should fix their eyes on him. He is the *pioneer* (Hebrews 2:10) and *perfecter* of faith. Just like the faithful before him, Jesus endured much (like the cross). In fact, he *scorned* (to think down) its shame. Jesus endured tons of flak, but he never lost heart.

Believers have cheerleaders from the past (a *great cloud of witnesses*—maybe the people mentioned in Hebrews 11) and a glorious Savior in the present. So, like a runner getting ready to run a race, the believer throws off anything that hinders—these could be good things or bad things. Today is the first Sunday of Advent. Put faith into action by looking to the Bethlehem baby.

*Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.*

## BE A FAITHFUL SERVANT

BY DAVID FAUST

Years ago, while leading a new church in New York, I gave the congregation a little survey. Among other questions, I asked those mostly new believers what the word *minister* means. Their most common answers were “preacher” and “teacher.” Others wrote “shepherd,” “leader,” and “counselor.” One respondent, I assume a child, wrote “dentist.” I laughed at that one, but there might be some truth in it. Sometimes ministry is like pulling teeth!

Unfortunately, no one answered with the most biblical definition: “servant.” Ministry is every Christian’s responsibility. “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10). The apostle Paul called his friend Tychicus “a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord” (Colossians 4:7). Reader friend, I exhort you to be a faithful servant, too.

**Be faithful to the Lord.** Guard your character and your state of mind. Don’t compromise your integrity, even in small matters. Remember who you are and whose you are. Above all, follow Jesus.

**Be faithful to Scripture.** God’s Word is a lamp to your feet. Don’t let Satan dim the light. If the Lord trusts you to lead others, they need to be loved, taught, and challenged, not just pacified and entertained. Resist the pressure to focus on fun and games or the latest social issue. Stay anchored in the book that is “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16). When you feel exhausted, catch your breath by inhaling the oxygen of God’s inspired Word. Believe it with all your heart. Do your best to live it and pass it along.

**Be faithful to your family.** Your spouse, children, and grandchildren deserve your best. Your public ministry gains credibility when you demonstrate faithfulness at home.

**Be faithful to the church.** Devote yourself to the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. Appreciate God’s blessings. Be a generous giver and a team player who encourages others. Make your leaders’ work a joy. Be a friend to those who are often overlooked—the shy, the old, little kids, the socially awkward, people with disabilities, the unpopular, the poor, the neighbor with a questionable reputation. Always keep God’s international family in mind. Pray for and support believers who live in other parts of the world.

**Be faithful to your calling.** When you serve the Lord, you will be scrutinized and criticized. At times you may be frustrated and disappointed. Often, you will feel tired. Almost always you will be in over your head. You will be “hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

Serve the Lord and you won’t be bored. Persevere, and as time passes you will see lives changed by God’s power, lost sheep find safety in the arms of the Good Shepherd, and longtime believers bear the fruit of the Spirit in fresh new ways. As you do your work, it will be “God who works in you” (Philippians 2:13).

Jesus never said, “Be famous.” He never insisted, “Be popular” or “Be successful.” But he did say, “Be faithful, even to the point of death” (Revelation 2:10). The greatest reward will be for the Lord to say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

### Personal Challenge:

In what areas of your life do you need to cultivate greater faithfulness? Think of a person you know who exemplifies faithfulness to the Lord. What qualities do you see in him or her that you want to emulate?

*David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.*

## DISCOVERY

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Last week, how specifically did you either . . .
  - draw nearer to God?
  - hold unswervingly to the hope you profess?
  - spur on others toward love and good deeds, encouraging them?

2. During the past week, what were you most thankful to God for?

Ask two people to read aloud **Hebrews 11:1-6, 30-40; 12:1-3** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to summarize the passages in a minute or less.

3. From these passages, describe what real, biblical faith looks like.

4. Let's dig deeper:

- What do people of faith know?
- What kinds of things do faithful people do?
- What kinds of things do faithful people endure?
- What kinds of things do faithful people receive?
- What kinds of things might faithful people not receive?
- What kinds of things do faithful people look forward to?
- What do faithful people do to keep from growing weary or losing heart?
- What does it look like for you to fix your eyes on Jesus, the "pioneer and perfecter of faith"?

5. What do you learn about God's nature from these passages?

6. What do you learn about human nature?

7. What do you learn about obeying God from the examples given in these passages?

*Note: This week, you are encouraged to break into same-gender subgroups of 3–4 people for the last three questions.*

8. What specifically does running "with perseverance the race marked out" for you look like as you put your faith into action this week?

9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

10. What tends to hinder or entangle you from living a life of active faith?

- How can we help you throw that off and run the race marked out for you?

**For Next Week:** This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at [ChristianStandard.com](http://ChristianStandard.com).