
PENTECOSTAL ASSEMBLIES OF THE WORLD

The Apostolic Way

2022-2023 ANNUAL SUNDAY SCHOOL COMMENTARY

King James Version

Apostolic Light Publications Charge

To provide a course of Bible study scaled to the learning abilities of each individual and designed to bring all learners to Christian maturity by involving the whole person through their five senses.

Philosophy

“So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading” (Nehemiah 8:8).

Purpose

“But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31).

Scope

1. Bible-Centered
2. Pupil-Related
3. Life-Adapted
4. Holiness-Oriented
5. Spirit-Controlled

When we shall have shaped the immortal destiny of the souls of men according to the Word of God, our work shall be complete. To this end, we commit ourselves to God for this task, having done service to Him. Then only may we feel that our obligation to God and man is complete.



THE APOSTOLIC WAY®
Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Inc.
2022-2023 Commentary

VOLUME 11

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are taken from
the authorized King James Version of the Bible.

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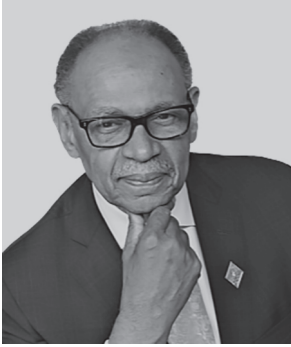
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From the Presider's Desk



Grace and Peace in the Precious Name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Lady L. Janice Brooks and I greet you in the Love of Christ! I am excited to greet you from the 2022-2023 edition of *The Apostolic Way* Sunday School Commentary. You will find in this commentary a collection of the hard work, intense study, and rich spiritual and theological insight that is the cornerstone of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Inc. As the oldest Apostolic organization in the world, the P.A.W. has been foundational in spreading the Apostolic truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ globally, and the Biblical and spiritual insight of our forefathers and mothers continues to carry us forward today. Many knowledgeable writers and thinkers have contributed to this body of work, and I believe that this commentary will aid in the expansion of your Biblical knowledge and your spiritual journey.

The Word of the Lord tells us “my people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6). It is critical that we constantly pursue Godly knowledge and wisdom in all things. We grow as individuals, churches, and an organization as a whole when we learn. I am excited for the fruitful study that will emerge from the foundation set by this commentary, and for the new ways in which we will grow. We have seen many of the prophecies of the Word fulfilled in our lives over the last year, and it is more imperative than ever that we commit ourselves to knowing the Word of God. For to know the Word is to know Him who is the Word made flesh (John 1). I pray this commentary will bless you as we endeavor to dive deeper into the Word of God.

I must also offer my many thanks to our publications team, contributing writers, and our partners at Urban Ministries, Inc. for their continual hard work in making this commentary come to life.

As always, Lady Brooks and I love you dearly, and we are continually praying for you, as you are praying for us! We declare God’s richest blessings over your life, your study, and your growth in the Lord Jesus Christ!

The Master’s Servant,
Bishop Theodore L. Brooks, Sr.
Presiding Bishop

Department of Publications of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World



Greetings in the Precious Name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

To the Presiding Prelate, Bishop Theodore L. Brooks, the Board of Bishops, Pastors, Christian Educators, and students, it is with such honor that I have been entrusted to serve as the Director of Marketing & Publications for the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Inc. It is my desire, that under the auspicious leadership of our Presiding Prelate, Bishop Theodore L. Brooks that we're able to effectively direct *The Apostolic Way* Commentary into a new year, with our hearts fully persuaded that the Kingdom of God is victorious.

One of the most important keys that will make it possible for us to walk in kingdom living is our expression of praise. The Lord's prayer begins in an attitude of worship and praise, **"Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name."** (Luke 11:2). Praise is the will of God, and heaven overflows with it.

Since the presence of praise is voiced continually in heaven, our voices should also be lifted up in praise. In **1 Thessalonians 5:16–18** we are told to, **"Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."** The Lord tells us that we are to have an attitude of joy, thanksgiving and prayer at all times, no matter what the conditions or circumstances are that surround us.

Throughout this Commentary, we will study and examine Scripture that expounds on this very thing— Blessing God at all times, not just when things go smoothly. We are to bless Him when things go wrong, too. We are to boast in the Lord even when all looks bleak. When we keep this attitude of praise in the midst of our trials, we come through victoriously.

As we look to this new season, it is my hope that our prayers are rendered in a spirit of praise, even in the midst of our trials.

Blessings,
Evangelist Neechy Dumas
P.A.W. Marketing & Publications Director

Department of Publications of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World



Greetings in the Great Name of Jesus!

“It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.” Lamentations 3:22–23

To our outstanding subscribers and supporters of *The Apostolic Way Commentary*, welcome to our 2022-2023 edition. It has been nearly two decades now that the vision of a Christian Education commentary that focused on the nuances of the Apostolic/Oneness doctrine was birthed in the mind of Dr. Rosa Sailes. Dr. Sailes is a former President of the International Christian Education Association, former editor of the *Apostolic Light* Sunday School manuals, and so much more. *The Apostolic Way Commentary* continues to this day as a dynamic resource for studying God’s unadulterated, infallible Word.

As you go through these pages, the themes you will encounter will include Faith, Hope, God: Jesus Christ and Worship. In addition to the rich exegesis of Scripture, featured are the essays of some of the most prolific writers among us. We are so excited to share their great work with you!

We could not end this greeting without saying thank you to our Presiding Prelate, the Honorable Bishop Theodore L. Brooks, Sr., the Board of Bishops, and Executive Officers of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, for their faithful spiritual and financial support. Similarly, many thanks to our current I.C.E.A. President, Dr. Barbara Payne, her staff and every Pastor, Sunday School superintendent, teacher, and student for your continued support. May the God of all grace continue to bless and keep you, as we know He will!

Bountiful Blessings,
Dr. Ruth A. Tyson Newton
Editor—*The Apostolic Way Commentary*

International Christian Education Association of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World



Greetings in the matchless name of Jesus,

To all Christian Education leaders and teachers, I celebrate each and everyone of you for the outstanding job you have done in the past two plus years in keeping connected!

We now are embarking on the 2022-2023 Christian Education year. Exploring **A Living Faith, HOPE, Worship and JESUS IS LORD!** Glory! Hallelujah! What a great privilege it is to be one of influence as we teach the Word of God, that is transformational.

Know this, we are the SALT of the earth, and according to Matthew 5: 13-16 we have the responsibility to preserve God's Word by living in accordance with what the Word declares, also believing and embracing that JESUS is our HOPE! Therefore, we Worship him, JESUS, for what He has done, is doing and will continue to do. For JESUS is our LORD!

Let us continue to be the SALT and influence the lives of those we teach. Remember SALT enhances the flavor of food, so our Christlike character and Godly living can be the example that will draw them.

Living Purposely for Kingdom Building!
Evangelist Dr. Barbara Payne
I.C.E.A. President

From the I.C.E.A. Auxiliary Director



Kingdom Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and King!

It is an awesome privilege to serve as Director of the International Christian Education Association of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World. Although the term, Christian Education is not found in the Bible, the Bible speaks of the moral and spiritual instruction of believers in general and of children in particular. The main purpose of Christian Education is to direct the process of human development toward God's objective and desire for man to walk in His ways: "*That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*" (2 Timothy 3:17).

Jesus Christ, the greatest leader and teacher of all times, chose twelve ordinary people to be His Disciples. With education and training, they were transformed into influential spiritual leaders of the Apostolic reformation. Christian Education is transformational. Therefore, as we step into the 2022-2023 year of our *Apostolic Way* publication, I encourage us all to actively participate in the learning process. God's Word has the power to transform us into the likeness of our Saviour. It is my prayer that as we study the Word of God, we will go from strength to strength.

For His Kingdom,
Bishop Barrington E. Smith
I.C.E.A. Director

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Q & A: How to Use *The Apostolic Way*

With our busy lives, preparing Bible lessons can be a daunting task. *The Apostolic Way Commentary* offers a number of teaching and learning ideas. These suggestions are based on questions many people ask.

Q. HOW CAN I GRASP THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE TEXT?

A. The **Bible Background** and **People, Places, and Times** sections in each lesson plus the **Quarterly Bible Book Overview Charts** provide information about the settings, situations, and circumstances behind the Bible book.

Q. IF I CAN'T AFFORD TO BUY A LOT OF COMMENTARIES, WHAT CAN I DO?

A. *The Apostolic Way* provides two (2) commentaries for each lesson as well as an easy-to-follow outline.

- **In Depth** is a section-by-section commentary that follows the **At-A-Glance** outline to ensure ease in reading and teaching. The In Depth commentary provides both background information and practical application ideas.
- **More Light on the Text** is a verse-by-verse commentary that gives precise Hebrew and Greek meanings and historical information from each verse. It provides timely research from scholars and authors.
- **Apostolic Commentary Revision** is provided in *The Apostolic Way* and *Apostolic Light* by P.A.W. scholars who have been baptized in Jesus' Name and filled with the Holy Ghost, in addition to their studies at some of the most renowned seminaries and Bible colleges in the nation.

Q. HOW CAN I BRING ALL OF MY TEACHING IDEAS TOGETHER?

A. The **Teacher Preparation** section of each lesson provides a detailed plan for studying and preparing teaching materials.

The **Teaching Notes** provide a research-based, Spirit-centered, **four-point curriculum** model, **O-P-E-N**, which takes you from preparation to actual teaching.

- **O—Open the Lesson** helps you connect to participant needs and knowledge.
- **P—Present the Scriptures** suggests creative ways to introduce the lesson text.
- **E—Explore the Meaning** strengthens Scripture presentation and discussion.
- **N—Next Steps for Application** encourages daily application of the passage.

The **ViewPoints Resource Guide**, found in the center section of *The Apostolic Way*, provides additional articles and resource tips.

Q. I REALLY WANT TO HAVE LIVELY CLASS DISCUSSIONS, BUT I STRUGGLE WITH NOT LECTURING (OR PREACHING) TO MY CLASS. WHAT CAN I DO?

A. **In Focus** provides a modern scenario or relevant article to open a lesson, apply a biblical truth, or emphasize a point.

- Questions for In Focus are included in **Discuss the Meaning**.
- Other sections that engage your class in discussion include **Search the Scriptures**, **Lesson in Our Society**, and **Make It Happen**.
- The **Follow the Spirit** and **Remember Your Thoughts** provide space for personal reflection.
- The P.A.W. website (www.pawinc.org) provides free slide presentation material and activities for each lesson.

Q. WHAT DOES *THE APOSTOLIC WAY* OFFER TO STRENGTHEN MY WALK WITH THE LORD AND MY ENERGY IN MINISTRY?

A. **Apostolic Basics!** provides essays that are basic to those who need to know the power of the Holy Ghost in their struggles.

- **Right Now Faith: Living Testimonies** are REAL testimonies from REAL saints in our congregations today who have opened their lives so others might be blessed.
- **T.I.P.S. for the Christian Educator** provides suggestions and support for teaching and leading Christian education programs.

Using *The Apostolic Way* with Small Groups

A trend among young pastors today is to abandon Sunday School in favor of other Christian education efforts. In a 2005 survey by the Barna Group, the percent of churches in the United States no longer prioritizing Sunday School had increased by 7% from 2002. The same is becoming more prevalent among Apostolic churches and other Pentecostal denominations.

At the same time, pastors and Christian educators are concerned about nurturing the spiritual growth of church members. Small groups have become commonplace; however, not all small group efforts reach the goal. This is because many small groups are centered on Christian books without adding actual Bible study to the mix, or groups are arranged according to participant interests. In a 2009 conference, the Willow Creek Church, which founded the small group movement, announced that it had changed its focus not completely away from small groups, but to an emphasis on the Bible and other spiritual practices that get to the heart of how people's lives change through the Word of God.

Sunday School is the ultimate small group! Nevertheless, other small group studies have value if they are Bible-centered. *The Apostolic Way* encourages the development of small group studies based on the lesson Scriptures in this commentary.

The Apostolic Way small group Bible study options:

- Alternative Adult and Teen small group study topics related to the weekly lesson are published online each quarter (see pawinc.org).
- New members classes can be developed by using the essays in the ViewPoints sections as well as selected weekly study topics.
- Small group Bible studies on how to live the Word in the world can be developed by combining the ViewPoints essays and selected weekly topics.
- Develop training sessions for teachers' meetings using the ViewPoints essays in the T.I.P.S. section.
- Liven and broaden your Bible study time by including small group studies during the week.

Source:

"Sunday School is Changing in Under-the-Radar But Significant Ways." <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/175-sunday-school-is-changing-in-under-the-radar-but-significant-ways?q=educational+sunday+school> Accessed April 20, 2012.

Quarter At-A-Glance

September 2022

A Living Faith

The study focuses on faith. The first unit uses passages from Hebrews to move participants toward a definition of faith, while the second and third units continue the study of faith through the lens of the Early Church.

UNIT 1 • What Is Faith?

These lessons engage learners in responsive obedience to God's love. This response is an act of faith.

Lesson 1: September 4, 2022 **Faith Calls for Perseverance** **Hebrews 10:19–31**

We can be secure about our spiritual lives. The writer of Hebrews tells us that through faith and because of the blood of Jesus, our sins can be forgiven and we can experience His presence in a new and life-giving way.

Lesson 2: September 11, 2022 **Faith Is Assurance** **Hebrews 11:1–3, 6; Psalm 46:1–3, 8–11**

Because of all the conflicts in the world, people may lose hope for positive change. According to the writers of Hebrews and Psalms, because God is with us, we can be rescued, and then change can take place by our belief in God's strength.

Lesson 3: September 18, 2022 **Faith Is Endurance** **Hebrews 12:1–11**

People know that to win a race, we sometimes have to suffer some pain but that we must keep our eyes on the goal. The writer of Hebrews

introduces us to a huge crowd of witnesses of the faith who have trained well, kept their eyes on God, and have grown in grace and character.

Lesson 4: September 25, 2022 **Faith Inspires Gratitude** **Hebrews 12:18–29**

People fear many things, especially judgment and death. The writer of Hebrews says God brought us forgiveness and the promise of eternal life.

Lesson 5: October 2, 2022 **Faith Requires Mutual Love** **Hebrews 13:1–3; 1 Corinthians 13**

People search for a workable and reliable definition of love. The writers of Hebrews and 1 Corinthians define love and tell us that it is greater than faith and hope.

UNIT 2 • Who Understands Faith?

The first two lessons focus on Stephen's message and martyrdom. The third lesson explores the repercussions for those who treat faith as a commodity. The fourth lesson looks at the faith that guides both Philip the evangelist and the Ethiopian seeker to examine the Scriptures together.

Lesson 6: October 9, 2022 **Stephen's Arrest and Speech** **Acts 6:8–7:2a**

People need a bold and perceptive leader to articulate truth in times of uncertainty. Stephen, in the face of opposition, demonstrated the

power and wisdom of the Spirit to speak the truth of Christ.

Lesson 7: October 16, 2022

Stephen's Martyrdom

Acts 7:51–8:1a

When Strong leaders confront traditional ideas, their words may incite anger and violence. Stephen's criticism of the religious establishment and his exaltation of Christ enraged the religious leaders, so they stoned him to death.

Lesson 8: October 23, 2022

Simon Wants to Buy Power

Acts 8:9–24

Some people try to buy power. When Simon the magician tried to buy the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter plainly laid out the fatal consequences for those who think the Spirit can be bought or sold.

Lesson 9: October 30, 2022

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

Acts 8:26–39

When it comes to membership in certain groups, some people want to prescribe who is in and who is out. Philip's sharing of the Good News about Jesus and the baptism of the Ethiopian demonstrate the universal availability of the gospel message.

UNIT 3 • What Does Faith Cost?

This unit is a four-lesson study of Paul's faith and ministry. The first lesson examines Paul's speech before King Agrippa. The second lesson goes with Paul aboard the ship to Rome. The final two lessons focus on Paul's ongoing ministry even though he is a prisoner.

Lesson 10: November 6, 2022

Paul Before King Agrippa

Acts 26:19–22

It is difficult to stand by our convictions when other people think we are crazy. Confident that he spoke the truth, Paul did not back down from sharing the story of his faith in Christ.

Lesson 11: November 13, 2022

Paul Sails for Rome

Acts 27:1–2, 33–44

In times of crisis, our panic can lead us to behave irrationally. Paul's confidence in God's faithfulness enabled him to act calmly and assure all the ship's passengers that they would survive the storm.

Lesson 12: November 20, 2022

Paul Ministers in Malta

Acts 28:1–10

Often we can tell something about the character of people by observing how they respond in difficult situations. Because through Paul's faith in Christ a man was healed, the people of Malta recognized something extraordinary about him.

Lesson 13: November 27, 2022

Paul Evangelized in Rome

Acts 28:23–31

It is a paradox of human nature that even when we have good news to share, some will ignore or reject it. Paul persevered in faith, preaching the Gospel, and bringing salvation to those who would listen, even though there were many who refused to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Fall Bible Book Overview

“A Living Faith”

Book	Author	Audience	Purpose	Key People
Matthew	Matthew (Levi)	Jewish people	To prove that Jesus is the Messiah, the eternal King	Jesus, Mary, Joseph, John the Baptist, the disciples, the religious leaders, Caiaphas, Pilate, Mary Magdalene
Mark	John Mark— not one of the 12 disciples— joined Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:13)	Christians in Rome, where the Gospel was written	To present the person, work, and teachings of Jesus	Jesus, the disciples, Pilate, the religious leaders
Luke	Luke—a doctor (Colossians 4:14), a Greek, and Gentile Christian, close friend and companion of Paul	Theophilus (“one who loves God”), Gentiles, and people everywhere	To present an accurate account of the life of Christ and to present Christ as the perfect human and Savior	Jesus, Elizabeth, Zechariah, John the Baptist, Mary, the disciples, Herod the Great, Pilate, Mary Magdalene
Psalms	King David wrote 73 psalms; Asaph (12); the sons of Korah (9); Solomon (2); Heman (with the sons of Korah); Ethan and Moses each wrote one; 51 are anonymous	Often paralleled Jewish history	To provide poetry for the expression of praise, worship, and confession to Almighty God.	David

Book	Author	Audience	Purpose	Key People
1 Corinthians	Paul	The church in Corinth and all believers	To identify and offer solutions to problems in the Corinthian church and to teach believers how to live holy, godly lives	Paul, Timothy, members of Chloe's household
Hebrews	Biblical scholars have suggested Paul, Luke, Barnabas, Apollos, Silas, Philip, Priscilla, and others	Perhaps second-generation Hebrew Christians	To show the sufficiency and superiority of Jesus Christ	Jews who were evaluating Jesus and who were struggling with their faith
Acts	See Luke Author	See Luke Audience	To give an accurate account of the birth and growth of the Christian church	Peter, John, James, Stephen, Philip, Paul, Barnabas, Cornelius, James (Jesus' brother), Timothy, Lydia, Silas, Titus, Apollos, Agabus, Ananias, Felix, Festus, Agrippa, Luke

Note: Matthew, Mark, and Luke are known as the Synoptic Gospels because of their close resemblance to each other in content and in viewpoint. Although they differ in many respects, they follow the same general order of events and deal largely with the ministry of Jesus in Galilee (Wycliffe, 713).

Sources:

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Teaching Tips

September 4
Bible Study Guide 1

Words You Should Know

A. Boldness (Hebrews 10:19) *parrhesia* (Gk.)—To have openness, frankness in speaking.

B. Faith (vv. 22, 23) *pistis* (Gk.)—Assurance; belief; a strong and welcome conviction or trust that Jesus is the Messiah.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle — Steadfast Determination. We can be secure about our spiritual lives. The writer of Hebrews tells us that through faith and because of the blood of Jesus, our sins can be forgiven, and we can experience the life that He has always wanted for us. We are able to walk and live in the newness of life.

A. Read the Bible Background and Devotional Readings.

B. Reread the Focal Verses in the KJV.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Open with prayer.

B. Have students read Aim for Change in unison.

C. Ask for a volunteer to read the In Focus story.

D. Discuss how to live by faith and experience God's presence.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Have volunteers read the Focal Verses and The People, Places, and Times. Discuss.

B. Read and discuss the Background section.

C. Encourage students to give thanks for the opportunity today to approach God through faith by the sacrifice made on Calvary, rather than through a high priest, as was done long ago.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Review and discuss the Search the Scriptures and Discuss the Meaning questions and the Lesson in Our Society section.

B. Ask students to share the most significant point they learned and how they will use that point this week.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Complete the Follow the Spirit and Remember Your Thoughts sections.

B. Remind students to read the Daily Bible Readings in preparation for next week's lesson.

C. Close in prayer, thanking God for His presence in our life.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher
Theme: Faith Calls for Perseverance
Song: "We've Come This Far by Faith"
Devotional Reading: Romans 5:1–5

Faith Calls for Perseverance

Bible Background • HEBREWS 10:19–31
Printed Text • HEBREWS 10:19–31 | Devotional Reading • ROMANS 5:1–5

AIM FOR CHANGE

By the end of the lesson, we will: KNOW Jesus’ sacrificial death opens the way to gain a relationship with Him; FEEL the importance of holding on to faith in Jesus; and SHARE our faith with others.

KEEP IN MIND

“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering;”
 (Hebrews 10:23, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Hebrews 10:19 Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,

20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;

21 And having an high priest over the house of God;

22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

23 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)

24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,

27 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

28 He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:

29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

30 For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.

31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

At-A-Glance

1. The Priesthood of Christ Is Superior (Hebrews 10:19–21)
2. The Priesthood of Christ and Our Profession of Faith (vv. 22–25)
3. The Priesthood of Christ and Knowledge of the Truth (vv. 26–27)
4. The Priesthood of Christ and How God Will Judge His People (vv. 28–31)

In Depth

1. The Priesthood of Christ Is Superior (Hebrews 10:19–21)

In chapters 5 through 10 of the book of Hebrews, the writer has explained that the priesthood of Christ is superior to the Levitical priesthood, which was made at Mount Sinai. The Levitical priesthood could not bring the people to perfection. There was no permanent reconciliation between the people and God through the temporary animal sacrifices. The people needed the perfect sacrifice, Jesus Christ, who gave His life once to restore the people to a relationship with Him. The Levitical high priests atoned for all sins of the people on the Day of Atonement. Every year, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies where he made a sacrifice for the nation's sins. A curtain prevented anyone from seeing the inner sanctuary. When Jesus died for the sins of humanity, the curtain was torn open from top to bottom permitting anyone to enter the Holiest of All. The high priest was no longer required for believers to be forgiven. This indicated that God wanted believers to go directly to Him through their faith in Him.

During biblical times, the high priest passed through a veil to enter the inner sanctuary where God's presence existed. Because of

Christ's sacrificial death on the Cross, believers can now personally come before the Lord. Christ shed His blood to give humanity the ability to enter into the Lord's presence. Our High Priest is Jesus Christ, who experienced the pain, temptations, and trials that we experience as believers. By the righteousness of Christ, our High Priest, we can approach the Lord with "boldness ... by the blood of Jesus" (Hebrews 10:19). Through the shed blood of Christ, we can come before our Creator by faith. Have you accepted Christ by faith and experienced a relationship with Him that is only available through Christ, the High Priest?

2. The Priesthood of Christ and Our Profession of Faith (vv. 22–25)

Through Christ, we can freely enter into the presence of the Lord. Through faith in Christ's work on our behalf, we have "full assurance," or certainty, that our sins are forgiven. There is an allusion to Christian baptism when the writer refers to "our hearts sprinkled" and "bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:22). Because of the eternal efficacy of the blood of Christ, our consciences are cleansed. When the high priest entered the "holy place . . . He shall put on the holy linen coat . . . the linen breeches . . . a linen girdle . . . these are holy garments" and he must be cleansed; therefore "shall he wash his flesh in water" (Leviticus 16:3-4). Likewise, the believer must be cleansed before he or she can come before the Holy One. While we are declared "not guilty" because of the work of Christ, we need to cleanse ourselves daily by turning away from sin and turning to the Lord to experience the fullness of relationship with Him. We must give ourselves completely to Him and maintain a personal relationship.

The writer encourages believers to "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering" (Hebrews 10:23). God reveals His promises and truths through His Word; thus, we must

embrace God’s Word and resist temptation and opposition. His promises are our treasures that we believe with a confident expectation. The foundation of our faith, therefore, is based upon the integrity and righteousness of Christ. We have hope because “God is faithful” (1 Corinthians 1:9). Although the Jewish Christians were experiencing persecution, the writer urges the believers to resist the temptation to apostasy. He wants to reassure the believers by calling them to remember, “He (God) is faithful that promised”; God will do what He has promised (Hebrews 10:23).

The writer instructs the believers to “consider”—which means to observe or contemplate—each other (Hebrews 10:24). Believers must provoke or stir up the qualities of love and good works toward each other (Hebrews 10:24). The writer knew believers could have an impact on one another by loving and doing good deeds for each other.

Because of the fear of persecution, some of the believers had stopped attending worship services; therefore, the writer encourages believers to pull together to stir up loving and active faith. The fellowship of believers is a source of encouragement; it is an opportunity to share faith and grow stronger. The writer urged the believers to get involved in encouraging or “exhorting one another” with the truth (Hebrews 10:25). The fellowship of believers promotes accountability; it is the opportunity to worship and pray with others. As you fellowship with the body of believers, encourage someone today!

3. The Priesthood of Christ and Knowledge of the Truth (vv. 26–27)

The writer of Hebrews reminds believers that if they “sin willfully” they deliberately reject Christ (Hebrews 10:26). It is a conscious rejection of His love and sacrifice after receiving the truth and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The writer does not refer to an occasional act of

sin. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Believers should not willfully rebel against the Lord’s provisions after receiving and fully understanding the “knowledge of the truth,” which is Christ’s offer of salvation (Hebrews 10:26).

The consequences of rejecting God are “judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries,” and there is no hope of forgiveness (Hebrews 10:27). Thus, those who reject Christ and disobey Him are His adversaries. There is one certain judgment, death and destruction, for obstinate apostates. The apostates will experience the wrath of God because there is no other help for sinners who reject their only remedy—salvation through accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

4. The Priesthood of Christ and How God Will Judge His People (vv. 28–31)

The Old Testament refers to the sin of idolatry that requires “two witnesses, or three witnesses ... (to) be put to death” (Deuteronomy 17:6). The judgment for idolatry was death by stoning, but there is a worse punishment for someone who rejects the word of Christ. If someone considers the “blood of the covenant ... an unholy thing,” the person grieves the “Spirit of grace,” the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 10:29). The person that rejects the Spirit of God will receive a punishment greater than a physical death.

Judgment belongs to God for “the LORD shall judge his people” (Deuteronomy 32:36). There is no other sacrifice for sin except Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross. If someone rejects the Lord’s mercy, they will receive His judgment. The writer of Hebrews states, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31). The apostate will experience an eternal punishment from God’s hands. Believers, who have received the mercy of God, are saved and have nothing to fear.

In Focus

Anthony and Angie dated for one year and had been friends for eight. One Saturday, Anthony met with Mr. Williams, Angie's father. Anthony said to him,

"May I have your permission to ask Angie to marry me? I love and respect your daughter and I want to make her my partner for life. She is my blessing from God. I can't imagine life without her."

Mr. Williams thought for a moment then smiled. "You have my permission, Anthony," he said. "Let's pray for your lives together."

One evening as Anthony and Angie walked through the park, Anthony knelt on one knee and proposed. Angie was speechless. As tears ran down her cheeks, she said,

"I have made too many mistakes in my life. You can't truly love me, because I have not forgiven myself. I don't deserve a life with you. I love you, but I can't marry you!"

As Angie started to leave, Anthony said, "We all make mistakes, but God forgives us when we sincerely come to Him."

Through faith in Christ, our sins are forgiven and we have a new life. In today's lesson, we can develop a personal relationship with Jesus by faith and enter into the presence of God.

The People, Places, and Times

Holy of Holies. It was located in the innermost sanctuary of the temple. Separated from the other parts of the temple by a thick curtain, the Holy of Holies was specially associated with the presence of Yahweh, God. In the early years of the existence of the temple, the Holy of Holies contained the Ark of the Covenant, which represented God's presence with the people of Israel.

High Priest. He was the one in charge of the temple worship. It was a hereditary position based upon descent from Aaron. Normally, the high priest served for life. Only the high priest

could enter the Holy of Holies and only on the Day of Atonement.

Hebrews. Because there are references to religious sacrifices and ceremonies, the book of Hebrews was probably written before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The name of the author is not given, but the person is a "brother" of Timothy (Hebrews 13:23). The setting for the book is a period when Jewish Christians underwent severe persecution from the Romans and Jews, both socially and physically. It's clear that the author was knowledgeable of the Old Testament because there are direct quotations from it as he argues the superiority of Jesus Christ and faith.

Background

Sacrifices were practiced from the earliest of times in the Old Testament. Sacrifices from the produce of the land and firstborn of the flock were offered by Cain and Abel; Noah built an altar and offered sacrifices after he left the ark. The Mosaic sacrifices were prior to Christ's ultimate sacrifice on the Cross. Animals were imperfect sacrifices that could not completely purify and atone for the sins of the people. If they could, they would have ceased. The annual sacrifice on the Day of Atonement was a visible reminder of the sins of humanity.

The writer expressed the importance and superiority of Christ's priesthood and the New Covenant to the Levitical priesthood and the Mosaic covenant. The Levitical high priest could only enter the Holy of Holies, which was the most holy place (inner sanctuary of the temple) one day a year, the Day of Atonement, the 10th day of the seventh month of the Jewish calendar (September-October). On the Day of Atonement, the high priest made reconciling sacrifices for the sins of the entire nation. The images that the writer revealed about the Day of Atonement emphasize the superiority of the priesthood of Christ.

In Chapter 9 of Hebrews, the writer explained that the *diatheke*—the Greek word for agreement, covenant, or arrangement—was placed into effect when Christ died (Hebrews 9:11–12, 24–28). The new covenant, which was initiated when Christ died, frees believers from the bondage of the first covenant. The Levitical sacrifice system which was the first arrangement, was not taken away as Jesus Christ was established as the perfect sacrifice.

Search the Scriptures

1. What is the “Holy of Holies” (Hebrews 10:19)?
2. What is the “new and living way” that Jesus has prepared for believers to come into the presence of God (Hebrews 10:20)?
3. Explain the difference between a “willful sin” and an “occasional sin.” (Refer to the “knowledge of the truth” and the effects of deliberately rejecting “the truth” that are discussed in Hebrews 10:26.)

Discuss the Meaning

1. How can we draw near and remain in the presence of God each day? How can we truly experience God’s presence?
2. When we accept Christ, He responds, “henceforth, I call you not servants ... I have called you friends” (John 15:15). What should be our response to Christ as believers? Does your relationship with Christ reveal that He is your friend?

Lesson in Our Society

Faith is effective when we depend on the Lord and rest in what Christ has done on the Cross. The writer of Hebrews urged believers to recognize the superiority of our faith and live in obedience to the Lord each day. Through Christ, we have an eternal reward and significant privileges that we can experience through our new life in Christ. Through Christ, we can experience the Lord’s presence and develop a relationship with Him. We can grow in faith and experience a deeper

relationship with God when we trust and believe without the doubts and concerns that the world presents. The world is temporary, but our life with the Lord is eternal. As a believer we must hold on to our faith, then we have an obligation to share our faith and our love for our Savior with others. By doing this, the believer hopes that they may be able to introduce others to a new life in Christ..

Make It Happen

The world focuses on tangible rewards, promotions, and recognition with financial bonuses. The world encourages the pursuit of tangible endeavors and earthly wealth with retirement plans focused on life in the world. Retirement plans are important, but as Christians, we must have dual purpose with us always prioritizing with making Heaven our home. Because we have accepted Christ by faith, we are friends of Christ with a purpose to share our love for Christ through faith. Consider local ministries that allow you to share your faith in Him. Volunteer your time to share your love for the Lord with people who do not know Him or share your faith and encourage believers who are homebound or sick. Help to strengthen others to remain faithful and to experience the Lord’s presence on a daily basis. Make a daily affirmation to share your faith. Finally, ask the Lord for boldness to share your faith with others. The Lord is faithful and He will honor the believer’s sincere request especially when its to be a greater servant to Him.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Hebrews 10:19–31

19 Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;

The writer of Hebrews has now concluded the doctrinal section of his epistle and has fully shown the superiority of Christ in all areas. He is superior to all men and angels, His priesthood is superior to that of Aaron and his successors. His blood, unlike that of the animal sacrifices, is efficacious in reconciliation of humankind to Him. In the following verses, the writer of the epistle proceeds to show the practical implications of his teachings. This is an allusion to the case of the high priest going into the Holy of Holies. He went with fear and trembling, because, if he had neglected the smallest item prescribed by the Law, he could expect nothing but death. Nadab and Abihu died while offering incense (Leviticus 10:2), and it had become the custom for the High Priest not to linger in the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement, lest people be terrified. Now we as believers have the opportunity to enter into the presence of the Lord. This is not a physical sanctuary anymore but it is the true divine place where our Lord resides by power of His death and the shedding of the blood of Jesus. We should always be forever grateful and thankful for the confidence

and boldness we were given to approach the throne of grace in our time of need. The believer should always remember to carry a thankful spirit for His atoning blood shed on Calvary as they enter into His divine presence. We now enter “the Most Holy Place” (Hebrews 10:19, NLT), which is no physical sanctuary but is, in truth, the presence of God “by the blood of Jesus” (v. 19, KJV), that is, on the basis of His saving death. We can come even to the throne of God with confidence, as we carry into the divine presence the infinitely meritorious blood of the atonement.

“By a new and living way” (v. 20): It is a new way because the death of Jesus on the Cross has created a completely new situation. The way by the old covenant neither gave life nor removed the liability to death. The way to peace and reconciliation, under the Old Covenant, was through the dead bodies of the animals slain; but Christ is living, and ever lives, to make intercession for us. Therefore, He is a new and living way.

“Through the veil” (v. 20): The High Priest lifted up or drew aside the veil that separated the holy from the Most Holy Place that he might have access to the Divine Majesty, and the veil of the temple was rent from the top to the bottom at the crucifixion of Christ to show that the way to the holiest was then laid open. Likewise, we must approach the throne through the mediation of Christ and through His sacrificial death. Here, the veil—His humanity—is rent, and the kingdom of heaven opened to all believers.

21 And having an high priest over the house of God;

The High Priest facilitated the role to allow mankind to get to the Lord. Now through Jesus, He does not just allow us to get into the presence, but He resides with us. The Church is now the Body of Christ, His Bride, and His true love. All believers of Jesus Christ are apart of His Church.

22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Our Savior's sacrifice on Calvary should spring Christians into action. First, we are to draw near to God "with a true heart." The word "true" suggests what is genuine, sincere, and faithful. The heart stands for the whole of the inner life of humanity, and it is important that as God's people approach Him, they be right inwardly. It is the "pure in heart" that see God (Matthew 5:8). All hypocrisy must go; this includes pretending to be what we are not or using Christian vocabulary when we are actually in a place of defeat. In view of what has been done for us, we should approach God in deep sincerity. The "full assurance of faith" stresses that it is only by trust in Him, who has performed for us the high priestly work that gives access to God, that we can draw near at all (Hebrews 10:22).

The references to the sprinkled hearts and the washed bodies should be taken together. The washing of the body with pure water is a reference to baptism. Baptism is the outward sign of an inward cleansing, and it was the latter that was the more important. So here it is mentioned first. The sprinkling of the hearts signifies the effect of the blood of Jesus on the innermost being. His shed blood cleanses believers within (see the sprinkling of the priests, Exodus 29:21; Leviticus 8:30).

23 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)

The second exhortation is to hold fast to the profession of faith. The verb translated here as "hold fast" (Gk. *katecho*, kat-EKH-o) has been previously used by the author for the readers to "hold fast" to their confidence and their glorying in hope (Hebrews 3:6) and the beginning of their confidence (3:14).

Now, he wants them to retain a firm grasp on "the confession of our hope" (10:23, NKJV). Christians can hold fast to their hope in this way because behind it is a God in whom they can have full confidence. As Luke Timothy Johnson states, "Holding to the confession is not a matter of grim determination, but of active and mutual commitment and up-building" (Johnson, 259). God is thoroughly dependable. When He makes a promise, it will infallibly be kept. He has taken the initiative in making the promise, and He will fulfill His purposes in making it. He who cannot lie promises the eternal life to you that is the object of your hope. As He who has given you this promise then is faithful, hold fast the profession of your hope.

24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

This is the only place where the author uses the expression "one another" (Gk. *allelon*, al-LAY-lone), though it is frequently found elsewhere in the New Testament. He is speaking of a mutual activity, one in which believers encourage one another, not one where leaders direct the rest as to what they are to do. Our danger is that we become so involved in this world that we forget the other. The word "provoke" is actually a noun (Gk. *paroxusmos*, par-ox-oos-MOS) that is often used negatively as causing "irritation" or "exasperation." It is used here in a positive sense to suggest "urging" or "stimulation." Christians are to provoke one another to "love" (*agape*), and to do good works. Corporate worship is important. We must worship together with other believers. There were some among those in the audience of the author of Hebrews who had abandoned the habit of meeting together. There may be some who think it is still possible to live the Christian

life while abandoning the habit of worshipping with God's people. This should not be the case. Donald Guthrie notes, "The New Testament lends no support to the idea of lone Christians. Close and regular fellowship with other believers is not just a nice idea but also an absolute necessity for the encouragement of Christian values" (Guthrie, 216). The exhortation takes on a sense of urgency "as ye see the day approaching" (v. 25). The "day" here has eschatological overtones that derive from the Old Testament prophetic tradition that spoke of a day in which God would judge (Joel 1:15; 3:14; Amos 5:18–20), a tradition that is maintained in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 1:8; 5:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:2). The day of the Second Coming is approaching; when things as we know them will end. The early Christians lived in that expectation. So must we. In the time we have, it is our duty to do all the good we can to all the people we can in all the ways we can.

26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, 27 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

It is clear that the writer has apostasy in mind. He is referring to people who "have received the knowledge of the truth" (Hebrews 10:26), where "truth" (Gk. *aletheia*, al-AY-thi-a) stands for "the content of Christianity as the absolute truth" as it frequently does in the New Testament. Receiving the knowledge of truth means entering into the community that is defined by the true God; in Hebrews, the comparison is often with the people of Israel where we find those in the community who turn away from the covenant through unbelief or idolatry. The people to whom the epistle was written, then, know what God has done. Their acquaintance with Christian teaching is more than superficial. Israel was

well acquainted with God and His covenant. If, knowing this, they revert to an attitude of rejection—of "sin(ning)" or continual sin (Gk. *hamartano*, ham-ar-TAN-o, meaning "keep on sinning")—then there remains no sacrifice for sins. An important word here is "willfully" (Gk. *hekousios*, hek-oo-SEE-ose), which can be translated as deliberately. It suggests that their action is voluntary. Such people have rejected the sacrifice of Christ.

The sin that is freely chosen couldn't be considered as a minor transgression, but apostasy, a deliberate turning away. "Only a fearful expectation of judgment" awaits such people (v. 27, NIV). The nature of this expectation is not defined, and the fact that the fate of these evil persons is left indefinite makes the warning all the more impressive. The Greek adjective *phoberos* (fob-er-OS), meaning "fearful" is unusual; it occurs elsewhere only in verse 31 and 12:21 and conveys the idea of "frightening."

In Hebrews 10:27, the NIV text describes it as "raging fire," an echo of Isaiah 26:11, which is a vivid expression for the fire of judgment that is intent on devouring His adversaries. In Hebrews 10:27, the word "adversaries" (Gk. *hupenantios*, hoop-en-an-TEE-oos) shows that the apostates were not regarded as neutral. They have become the enemies of God.

28 He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: 29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

Jews held the Law of Moses to be divinely given: Anyone who rejected it also rejected God's direction and was killed without compassion. There was no place for mercy. They must be executed (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15).

The author of Hebrews invites the audience to work out for themselves the worst punishment someone would deserve for rejecting the gift of God. Because Jesus is greater than Moses, it must be more severe than the old way (Hebrews 3:1–3); the new covenant is better than the old, founded on better promises (8:6) and established by a better sacrifice (9:23).

The grievousness we experience when we “deliberately continue sinning” (10:26, NLT) is elaborated in three ways of 10:29. First, such a person has “trampled underfoot the Son of God” (NASB). The verb “trampled” is found in the NASB (Gk. *katapateo*, ka-ta-pa-TEH-o), used with a personal object. “Trampled underfoot” is a strong expression for disdain. It implies not only rejecting Christ but also despising Him. This is more than falling from grace; it is a mockery of the giver of grace.

Another characterization of the apostate is that the person takes the shedding of covenant blood lightly. “The blood of the covenant” is an expression used for the blood that established the old covenant (Exodus 24:8; see Hebrews 9:20) and also of the blood of Jesus that established the new covenant (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; see also Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25). The apostate states that blood is “a common thing” (Hebrews 10:29, NKJV). That is to say he treats the death of Jesus just like the death of any other man. The word “common” can also be understood as against the holy or “unhallowed.” This stands out more sharply with the understanding that this blood has “sanctified” him. To go back on this decisive act is to deny the significance of the blood, to see it as a common thing.

The third indictment of the apostate is that he or she has done this spitefully or has “insulted the Spirit of grace” (v. 29, NIV). In the Greek, the writer’s word for “insulted” is *enubrizo* (en-oo-BRID-zo), an intensified form of *hubris* (HOO-bris), which means to reduce the honor that is due

to another person. Willful sin is an insult to the Spirit, who brings the grace of God to humanity.

30 For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.

The author calls God “him that hath said.” He uses the Greek word for “said” (*epo*, EP-o) six times, four with quotations from Scripture. He is sure that God speaks to people. The author’s first quotation here is from Deuteronomy 32:35. Vengeance is a divine prerogative. The emphasis here is on the certainty that the Lord will act. The wrongdoer cannot hope to go unpunished because avenging wrong is in the hands of God. The second quotation from Deuteronomy 32:36 leaves no doubt about the Lord’s intervention, for He is named and so is His activity. The word “judge” in Hebrews 10:30 may mean “give a favorable judgment” as well as “condemn.” The latter is intended here. Claiming to be one of God’s people does not exempt a person from judgment. God judges all. Let not the apostates think that they, of all people, can escape.

31 It’s a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

A simple statement carries a chilling effect. “Falling into the hands” of someone means to come under their power (Judges 15:18). Usually “falling into (God’s) hands” means reassurance, but not in this context. To fall into the hands of God is to fall under His displeasure, and He who lives forever can punish forever. How dreadful to have the displeasure of an eternal, Almighty God to rest on the soul forever! Apostates and all the persecutors and enemies of God’s cause and people may expect the heaviest judgments of an incensed deity; and these are not for a time but through eternity.

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Say It Correctly

Abihu. uh-**BAHY**-hyoo.
Nadab. **NAY**-dab.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

A Great Faith
(Matthew 8:5–13)

TUESDAY

A Saving Faith
(Romans 10:8–17)

WEDNESDAY

A Justifying Faith
(Galatians 2:15–21)

THURSDAY

An Examined Faith
(2 Corinthians 13:5–10)

FRIDAY

An Enduring Faith
(Romans 5:1–5)

SATURDAY

An Exemplary Faith
(1 Thessalonians 1:2–10)

SUNDAY

The Full Assurance of Faith
(Hebrews 10:19–31)

Notes

Teaching Tips

September 11
Bible Study Guide 2

Words You Should Know

A. Faith (Hebrews 11:1, 3, 6) *pistis* (Gk.)—Belief with the predominant idea of trust (or confidence); assurance.

B. Refuge (Psalm 46:1) *machaceh* (Heb.)—A shelter from rain, storm, or danger; hope.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Steadfast Confidence. According to the writers of Hebrews and Psalm, because God is with us, we can be rescued and change can take place by believing in His strength.

- A. Pray for lesson clarity.
- B. Read and study the entire lesson.
- C. Read the Focal Verses in a modern translation.

O—Open the Lesson

- A. Before the students arrive, write on the board, “How do we experience the presence of God?”
- B. Open with prayer.
- C. Discuss the question.
- D. Ask the students to share times they have experienced the presence of God in their lives.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Focus on God’s presence and the awareness that God is always with us.

B. Read and discuss the Focal Verses, The People, Places, and Times and Background sections.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Discuss the Lesson in Our Society and Discuss the Meaning.

B. Share the most significant points from today’s lesson.

N—Next Steps for Application

- A. Read the Keep in Mind verse in unison.
- B. Complete the Follow the Spirit and Remember Your Thoughts sections.
- C. Close in prayer, thanking God for the miracles that He has already revealed.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher
Theme: Faith Is Assurance
Song: “Blessed Assurance”
Devotional Reading: Psalm 27:1–6

Faith Is Assurance

Bible Background • HEBREWS 11:1–7; PSALM 46:1–11 | Printed Text • HEBREWS 11:1–3, 6; PSALM 46:1–3, 8–11 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 27:1–6

AIM FOR CHANGE

By the end of the lesson, we will: KNOW the meaning of faith and its implication for our lives; FEEL God’s constant presence; and DEVELOP a practice of relying on God for positive change.

KEEP IN MIND

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”
(Hebrews 11:1, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

2 For by it the elders obtained a good report.

3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Psalm 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

2 Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;

3 Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.

46:8 Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth.

9 He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.

10 Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.

11 The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

At-A-Glance

1. Faith Is Confidence and Certainty
(Hebrews 11:1–3)
2. Faith Is Necessary (v. 6)
3. Faith Is Trust in God as Our Refuge
(Psalm 46:1–3)
4. Faith Is Trust in God Whose Presence
Is Constant (v. 8–11)

In Depth

1. Faith Is Confidence and Certainty (Hebrews 11:1–3)

The author of Hebrews chapter 11 gives a definition of what faith is as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). The author wants the believers to have a complete confidence and trust in God that He will fulfill every promise that He has made. Even though the believers may not be able to figure out what the future may hold or if tomorrow is promised, they can rest assured in one thing: that God is faithful. No matter how much believers struggle in their life, they can hold fast to what this author continues to let them know by the reports that the elders received, which is called a “good report” (Hebrews 11:2). Those elders showed their the purity of their faith even though they faced hardship and difficult times. It reminds the believers that they can do so as well. Many Jewish teachers believed the material universe was created based on God’s invisible pattern exemplified in His Word or wisdom. By faith, we believe God created everything out of nothing. Moses detailed the story of creation in Genesis chapter 1; there was a majestic display of power and purpose. With each creation, God “saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21). By faith, we believe God spoke and created the entire universe. Our faith is based upon

who God is; our response should be confident and certain hope in God because He is ever present. Do you have absolute and confident faith in God?

2. Faith Is Necessary (v. 6)

Faith reveals the reality of God. “It is impossible to please God” without faith because faith is necessary to have an active relationship with God; it is necessary to walk with God (Hebrews 11:6, KJV). By faith, we believe in God and trust with certainty the future promises that He has revealed.

The elders, who were aforementioned as receiving the “good report” (Hebrews 11:2), believed and obeyed regardless of the consequences. In the same way, we can believe with a willing trust and please God. Our steadfast confidence is based upon who God is—the creator of the universe. God will recognize and reward our faith because we “diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). By faith, we realize our own insufficiency and depend on God to work within us and through us. By faith we have confidence in the continual promises of God.

3. Faith Is Trust in God as Our Refuge (Psalm 46:1–3)

The sons of Korah were temple assistants who wrote Psalm 46. The psalmists recognized God as their source of help; they realized God’s complete power and ability to rescue His children. As believers, we do not need to fear because God’s presence is constant. God is our refuge; therefore, we can flee to Him and find security.

Life presents temporary destruction, doubts, and uncertainty, but God’s presence is constant; “therefore will not we fear” (Psalm 46:2). We can appreciate God’s constant presence because He is our mighty fortress. The earth swallowed up Korah, but the psalmists did not fear. We can be fearless with God as our present help,

too. God is not a temporary resource; instead, God is our eternal refuge. The psalmists remind believers, “Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake,” God’s power is complete and victory in Him is certain (Psalm 46:3). We should not be troubled when the earth is unstable because our confidence is not found in the earth. Our confidence is based upon God, our sound eternal footing.

4. Faith Is Trust in God Whose Presence Is Constant (vv. 8–11)

The psalmist urges the believers to “behold the works of the LORD” (Psalm 46:8). Recognize the presence of God and His ability to save His children. He is the creator who cares for nature and all living things. As believers, we can trust in God’s strength and His constant presence. Those who oppose God will experience desolation and face His judgment. But believers can stand in awe of God’s power.

The psalmist encourages believers to respond with a generous heart. We can, as the psalm states, “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). Even though war, destruction, and famine are a part of the world, God is still in charge. He is sovereign. Final victory belongs to Him, and He will be exalted. Therefore, we can rest assured and know with comfort that He is Lord.

In Focus

The students knew today’s lecture was going to be about the terrorists’ attacks on September 11, 2001, but they wondered why it was going to be discussed in their African American Studies class.

Professor Williams started the class by asking the students what they thought of the movie she assigned, “The World Trade Center.” Several students shared their critiques of the movie. When she asked what was missing, the room was silent.

Then a student asked, “Were the Black people on the board behind you also directly affected by the attacks?”

“Yes, Deshawn,” Professor Williams said. “Not only were the stories of African Americans left out of the news coverage at that time but the real life account of Jason Thomas, a former U.S. Marine who helped to rescue New York Port Authority police officers from out of the rubble, was cast as a white man in the movie. It’s as if anyone Black was scrubbed from this event.”

She told the students that over 260 African Americans died in New York; Washington DC; and Shanksville, PA on that day.

Professor Williams continued, “These stories aren’t just important for their families, and the nation at large, but for us as African Americans. Mr. Thomas had the faith and commitment to do the work he was called to do, even though it could have cost him his life.”

In today’s lesson, we learn that when we experience conflicts in life, we can trust God by faith to see us through.

The People, Places, and Times

Sons of Korah. Psalm 42 through 49 were written by the sons of Korah, who were temple musicians and assistants. The Korahites were among the chief Levitical families; they were listed as “gatekeepers.” Korah was a Levite who led a rebellion against Moses. Although Korah was killed, his family remained faithful to God and continued to serve in His temple. King David appointed men from the clan of Korah to serve as choir leaders. Later, the choir leaders continued to serve as temple musicians for hundreds of years.

Psalm. The book of Psalm is a series of five collections: Book 1 (Psalm 1–41), Book II (Psalm 42–72), Book III (Psalm 73–89), Book IV (Psalm 90–106) and Book V (Psalm 107–150). Several authors wrote the collections, and some are anonymous. David wrote at least 73 psalms, and Asaph, sons of Korah, Moses, Solomon, Ethan, and Heman wrote others. Psalm was written over a period of more than 1,000 years, which included the time of Moses

(around 1440 B.C.) to the time of captivity in Babylon (around 586 B.C.). The majority of the books were written during Israel's wilderness experience and time in Israel, Judah, or Babylon. The title "Psalm" was first used in the Septuagint. The traditional Hebrew title is *tehillim*, which means "praises" but most of the psalms are *tephillot*, which means "prayers."

Background

The readers of the book of Hebrews knew Scripture and professed faith in Christ. Because of doubt, persecution, or false teaching, the believers, who were Jewish Christians, considered giving up Christianity and returning to Judaism. The writer emphasized the superiority of faith to encourage the Christians of the first century to stand by faith.

Christians were demoralized and discouraged because centuries of tradition were replaced with spiritual freedom based upon faith in Christ. As a result, the believers experienced the wrath of the Jewish religious establishment because they believed in Old Testament prophecy being fulfilled through Jesus Christ, the Messiah. The writer wanted to prevent believers from rejecting Christianity and returning to Judaism.

The writer explained the superiority of faith by examples of people who demonstrated greater faith. The elders of faith were intended to encourage the power of faith as the believers adhered to their profession of true religion. Through examples in biblical history, faith is revealed through assurance in God's future promises with the implications that inspire believers to persevere. Through the summary of Jewish history, the heroes of faith challenge believers to grow in faith and live in obedience to God. Psalm 46, which was written by the sons of Korah—who were temple assistants—was a celebration of God's deliverance. The psalm may have been written when the Assyrian army invaded the land and surrounded Jerusalem. As

the psalm speaks to ancient Israelites, it speaks to believers today. We need not fear if we trust God. Through faith we can give thanks for God's constant presence in our lives. Because God is with us, we can be rescued. The writer refers to a "river" (Psalm 46:4), which is the tunnel that King Hezekiah built to guarantee a continuous water supply for Jerusalem during times of war. Like the tunnel, God's presence is constant for believers.

Search the Scriptures

1. How did the writer of Hebrews describe faith (Hebrews 11:1)?
2. Who received a "good report" (Hebrews 11:2)?
3. Why is faith necessary to "understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God" (Hebrews 11:3)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. The writer explains that faith is required to understand that God created the universe where nothing existed. Genesis 1 details the awesome creation of the universe that was formed by God's Word. Faith is the beginning of our relationship with God. What qualities of faith are necessary to continue to grow and strengthen our relationship with God?
2. When Korah, Dathan, and Abiram led 250 princes against the priesthood of Aaron and Moses' general authority, God punished the leaders by allowing their challengers to be swallowed up by the earth. A fire consumed 250 of them. The psalmists, the sons of Korah, reiterate God's presence and encourages readers not to fear. How can we maintain a quiet confidence in the midst of economic turmoil, natural disasters, and continual wars?

Lesson in Our Society

If we watch the news, listen to the radio or interact with others on social media, we hear about the current state of the world. The pandemic

has devastated communities in different ways. Many people are homeless, unemployed, or on the verge of both. Natural disasters occur, and the number of fatalities grows. War and destruction are continually reported by the news. Peace seems impossible. While positive change seems nonexistent, we must not lose hope. God is ever present. If we trust God, we will be rescued, and change will occur through God’s strength. We can rely on God for positive change as we realize our faith will be tested. How has your faith in God become stronger or weaker in light of world events, catastrophes, and unrest? How much do you think the world dismisses the constant help of God as a result of abundant negativity, catastrophe, and unrest?

Make It Happen

To remain faithful with steadfast confidence and certainty, we must keep our eyes on God through continual prayer. We must remain hopeful for positive change, as we believe that God is in control. We can have faith in God’s constant presence even today because we know He is our refuge in times of trouble. Make a commitment to regularly attend Bible class and Sunday School to increase your awareness of God’s power in troubling times. Join ministries that actively build the community and encourage people who are suffering or do not know God. Allow God’s presence to be evident through your actions and words.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Hebrews 11:1–3, 6; Psalm 46:1–3, 8–11

1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Faith, the author of Hebrews tells us, is the substance of things hoped for. The Greek word *hupostasis* (hoop-OS-tas-is) translated “substance” (KJV), has previously been used with the same meaning in 1:3. In other contexts, it may be regarded as “confidence,” a subjective meaning, as in 3:14. The translation “substance” is preferred here. Understood this way, it means that faith authenticates the things believers hope for as though things already exist. Faith lays hold of invisible realities. The word “evidence” (Gk. *elegchos*, EL-eng-khos) usually signifies a proof or test. Faith is the evidence or proof for things unseen. It then acts on those unseen things as if they are visible or easily identified by the senses.

2 For by it the elders obtained a good report.

Verse 2 goes further to explain how faith is the “substance” or “proof” because “the elders” (Gk. *presbuteros*, pres-BOO-ter-os), a term that may be used of age or dignity. These men and women had witnesses borne to them (Gk. *epimartureo*, ep-ee-mar-too-REH-o) or were held up as good examples on account of their faith. In agreement with the author’s usage of “bearing witness or testifying” in 2:4; 7:8, 17;

10:15, and elsewhere, it is clear that God is the one who bore the witness to or gave affirmation to the faith of the elders.

3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

“Through faith” runs through the chapter with compelling emphasis. For the most part, it is attached to the accomplishments of the great ones of previous generations. Here, however, the writer speaks not only of the ancients or elders but also of “we” in the present, claiming a close tie between the author and the audience. Faith is a present reality, not exclusively the property of past heroes. Faith gives us convictions about creation. For the author, the visible universe is not sufficient to account for itself. But it is faith, not something material, that assures the author that the universe originated with God. The author’s view is nonetheless certain because it is based on faith, and the author does not qualify this statement as though any doubt were possible. This world is God’s world, and faith assures the author that God created it. Faith’s understanding that the universe is framed or fashioned by the Word of God changes the human perception of all things: “So that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” Without a doubt, this is the most indispensable of all insights, the one that distinguishes believers from the unbelievers. The world is not self-derived, self-contained, nor self-sufficient.

11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

In this verse, the author draws out the implication of Abel and Enoch’s examples (Hebrews 11:4–5) with a general proposition

concerning faith itself. He moves directly to faith as an appropriate way of responding to God. Though the Old Testament does not say that Enoch had faith, the author goes on to explain the reason for the use of this word in this context. It is impossible to please God without faith, and Enoch pleased God. Thus, it is clear that he had faith. The author issues a flat denial that anyone can please God apart from faith. The author does not say simply that without faith it is difficult to please God; but that without faith, it is impossible to please Him! There is no substitute for faith. Whoever approaches God must first believe that He exists. This is basic. Without it, there is no possibility of faith at all. But it is not enough. There must also be a conviction “that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (11:6, KJV). Only if God is all-powerful Creator can He reward those who seek Him. As Barclay puts it, “We must believe not only that God exists but also that he cares” (Barclay, 139). Without that deep conviction, faith in the biblical sense is not a possibility.

46:1 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. 2 Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; 3 Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.

Psalm 46 has been popularized by Martin Luther’s rendition in the hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” It is said that he wrote it at that moment in 1529 when the Turkish army retreated to the Balkans after besieging the walls of Vienna in vain. The psalm is an expression of confidence in God. It begins with a confession of faith and presents God in a very personal way to Israel. The “help in trouble,” in which God offers protection, are times when chaos replaces order, both in the natural world and in the world of nations and human affairs (46:1, KJV). The

affirmation of God's presence in a protective capacity is the basis for the confidence in the community's words: "We will not fear," (v. 2, KJV). This great God is "ever-present" with His people. His presence in protecting the people of God is described by three words: "refuge," "strength," and "fortress." These words designate the source and effectiveness of Israel's strength. God is their strength (see Psalm 29:11; 68:35; 71:7; Isaiah 26:1). As their strength, He is like a refuge where one finds rest and asylum (see Psalm 14:6; 61:3; 62:7–8; 71:7; Isaiah 25:4; Jeremiah 17:17). His strength is also evident when they find protection in Him as a fortress. The fortress was an isolated, elevated place where people built a stronghold against the enemy (see Psalm 9:9; 18:2; 48:3; Isaiah 33:16). Each of these descriptions relates to a people in need. Only when they are in distress do they need His special protection (see Psalm 22:19; 27:9; 40:13). They always need Him, but they experience the power of His presence particularly in periods of anguish and distress (see 23:4). Then He is close to them— "very present" (46:1; see Deuteronomy 4:7). God had always been their strength—including when Moses led them out of the clutches of Pharaoh in Egypt. Consequently, He could now be trusted to remain even if the mountains below the ocean were to quake, consequently causing a flood. For God is Immanuel, meaning, "God is with us." Thus, if God is not moved, then, because our refuge is in Him, we shall not be moved either.

46:8 Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth. 9 He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.

The psalmist exhorts the godly to be wise and discerning by considering the works of God.

The announcement is applicable to almost any occasion when the people of God were delivered from a pressing peril. For Israel, the "works of God" include all acts of God in the history of salvation: Exodus, conquest, the period of the judges, and the monarchy (see Psalm 66:5–7). Reciting the mighty acts of God plants evidence of His care, protection, and providential rule deep in the memory of God's people. Those who are wise enough to remember and see the world around them have tokens of God's presence with God's people. The deliverance of Israel from its threat occurs by "desolations," which God accomplishes among the nations (46:8). But there is another side to the story. Every victory, every subjugation of a hostile nation, and every stroke on the canvas of the history of redemption clarifies that the Lord's very plan for humanity includes cessation of wars for an era of peace. His judgments of the nations will result in removal of evil instigators, troublemakers, rebels, and expressions of hostility in every form. The God of peace will make "wars cease" (46:9; see Isaiah 2:4; Ezekiel 39:9; Micah 4:3; Zechariah 9:10). The instruments of warfare described in Psalm 46:9, symbolized by the bow, the spear, and the chariot, will become inoperative (see Isaiah 9:4; Ezekiel 39:9–10; Hosea 2:18; Micah 4:1–4). Yet, to do so, in the end, God must surely cause great convulsions—for evil is a serious power to be reckoned with. Consequently, He breaks the bow and shatters the spear and burns the chariot in the fire.

46:10 Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. 11 The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

Verse 10 begins with a common invitation in Christian spirituality. In its context, as John Goldingay rightly observes, the verse "issues an important challenge to the superpower to stand still and recognize that God is God and that the

superpower is not” (Goldingay, 73). Israel, like the nations, must stop looking after its own destiny and acknowledge that God is God—therefore God is its refuge and strength. Yet, the verse speaks to us to learn to cultivate the habit of silence. Second, the psalmist encourages the godly to “know” that the Lord is God. Though it was tempting to ally themselves with foreign powers, to rely on military strength, or to give themselves over to idolatry and pagan ways, the godly had to learn to persevere to the end by trusting in God. Throughout the history of Israel and Judah, severe national distress brought the temptation to abandon true religion for the short-lived security of political alliances, military strength, and worldly paganism. Instead of choosing a negative option, the people of God distinguished themselves by their pursuit for godliness: “Know that I am God.” The knowledge of God includes a factual understanding about Him, His past acts, and His promises. But in this context, the psalmist calls on the Israelites to commit themselves to the Lord and to seek His “refuge,” “strength,” and “fortress” (vv. 1, 7, 11). Peter Craigie sums up verse 11 this way: “Both the ‘nations’ and the ‘earth’ (v. 11), which earlier were depicted as posing a threat to orderly existence, are now harnessed in service to the exaltation of God. Hence, the people may ‘relax’ in appropriate confidence (v. 11a); to know that God is God is to know His Lordship of nature and history, and therefore to be aware of His total capacity as Protector” (Craigie, 345). The God of our ancestors is still the God we have today, still our refuge, our fortress!

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Say It Correctly

Abel. **AY**-buhl.
Cain. **KAYN**.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

The Trusting Child
(Mark 10:13–16)

TUESDAY

The Trust of the Weak
(2 Chronicles 14:2–12)

WEDNESDAY

The Prayer of Trust
(Psalm 3)

THURSDAY

The Security of Trust
(Psalm 4)

FRIDAY

The Confidence of Trust
(Psalm 27:1–6)

SATURDAY

The Patience of Trust
(Psalm 27:7–14)

SUNDAY

The Certain Refuge
(Hebrews 11:1–3, 6; Psalm 46:1–3, 8–11)

Notes

Teaching Tips

September 18
Bible Study Guide 3

Words You Should Know

A. Witnesses (Hebrews 12:1) *martus* (Gk.)—Those who can verify a particular truth based on what they know, have seen, or heard.

B. Chastening (vv. 5, 7, 11) *paideia* (Gk.)—Education or training; by implication, it also means disciplinary correction.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Steadfast Fortitude.

The writer of Hebrews tells us to keep our eyes on Christ Jesus to grow in grace and character.

A. Study Hebrews 11 and 12.

B. Make a list of some of the struggles African Americans have had to endure to reach and enjoy the standard of living we experience today.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Open the class with prayer.

B. Ask the students to share some of the ways they have suffered and dealt with adversity and the lessons they learned.

C. Have the students silently read the In Focus story. Discuss.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Use the Background and The People, Places, and Times sections to build the lesson.

B. Discuss why God allows His children to suffer for righteousness' sake.

C. Ask a student to read Hebrews 12:1–11 and then discuss it with the entire class.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Have volunteers respond to the Discuss the Meaning questions.

B. Explain that 2 Corinthians 13:5 teaches that we are to examine ourselves to see whether we are “in the faith.”

C. Ask: What can we learn from suffering for Christ's sake? Have we denied ourselves, taken up our crosses, and followed Jesus?

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Ask the students to share some of their trials and tribulations that have made them stronger in their faith with others who are in need.

B. Close with prayer.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Faith Is Endurance

Song: “I Am on the Battlefield
for My Lord”

Devotional Reading: James 5:7–11

Faith Is Endurance

Bible Background • HEBREWS 12:1–11

Printed Text • HEBREWS 12:1–11 | Devotional Reading • JAMES 5:7–11

AIM FOR CHANGE

By the end of the lesson, we will: DESCRIBE how to have enduring faith; BECOME CONVINCED that we can endure in faith; and DEVELOP a plan to utilize our faith to determine and reach spiritual goals.

KEEP IN MIND

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:1–2, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Hebrews 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

Focal Verses

11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

At-A-Glance

1. Believers Must Run the Race (Hebrews 12:1–2)
2. Believers Must Develop Endurance (vv. 3–6)
3. Believers Must Learn to Accept the Discipline of the Lord (vv. 7–11)

In Depth

1. Believers Must Run the Race (Hebrews 12:1–2)

The writer encourages the Christian readers to continue to “run their race” of discipleship no matter what tries to hinder them. He tells them not to get distracted by burdens or sins that are present in their lives. When the writer addresses the sins that are present in a person’s life, it does not mean a person who is willfully sinning, but one who is facing the challenges and burdens that come along with the Christian journey. This person has a clear conscience to live a godly life.

Being a Christian was not an easy thing back then, and it still isn’t today. It is a lifelong commitment that involves peaks and valleys, good times and bad times, and sunshine and rain. Christian discipleship is not akin to a sprint; it is a marathon. That is why the author tells his audience to use “perseverance” (v. 1, NIV). Perseverance is an inner quality that allows one to continue in some course of action in spite of difficulty or opposition. To persevere is to be steadfast in a particular purpose.

Disciples of Jesus Christ must always look to Jesus as the ultimate model of perseverance. In His ministry, He suffered insults and attempts on His life. He persisted even though His hometown and relatives rejected Him. He overcame the obstinacy of His followers and betrayal by one of His own. He never faltered during the unjust criminal trial that accused Him of sedition and heresy or the beating by the Roman police force. Finally, He did not waver on the Cross at Calvary. He did all of that not only so future generations of believers would have access to a spiritual power potent enough to change the world but also to set an example of the perfect leader who was tempted but did not give in. And most importantly, He endured the Cross to carry our sins and provide the way of salvation for us.

We must also remember that we have an inspiration. We are surrounded by a “great ... cloud of witnesses,” credible leaders who have fought a good fight, finished their course, kept the faith, and earned their crowns of righteousness. They are our inspiration. Our heroes of faith should inspire us to keep our faith so we can pursue a life of complete holiness and participate in kingdom work that can change our world and be a witness of the world to come. Today, we look at heroes of faith such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mary McLeod Bethune, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Rosa Parks.

Therefore, as we continue to live as ambassadors of Christ, let us persevere on our jobs, in our homes, and in our communities. The Lord demands our best in this life. No matter what hardships we go through, our history is peppered with credible leaders who have overcome greater hardships than we have ever had to imagine. We can learn from them. If they made it, surely we can make it. With the Lord on our side and a “great . . . cloud of

witnesses” cheering us on, we can get through any adverse situation we face.

2. Believers Must Develop Endurance (vv. 3–6)

When life becomes unbearable and we get discouraged by some temporal circumstances, we ought to have enough of a spiritual sense to look to Jesus as our source of strength. If we think of all that Jesus endured, giving His life so we might have life, we have to thank Him for His character and integrity when he suffered on the Cross, giving His life for all humankind.

The writer of Hebrews encouraged the vacillating Jewish Christians, when they began to complain about the adversity they had to face, to consider Jesus’ suffering. He supported his argument by testifying that they had not faced persecution to the degree that they had shed their own blood. He also let them know that trials suffered for righteousness’ sake could be theologically viewed as the “chastening of the Lord,” the Lord’s “disciplinary correction, instruction, and nurture.”

The Lord’s chastening is not arbitrary or without direction—it always has a purpose. The writer suggests that trials could be disciplinary correction and a part of the Lord’s overall plan to edify His children. Corrective discipline is always a good thing that symbolizes love. When an earthly father exercises discipline on his child, in most cases it’s meant to be beneficial to the child so that the same wrong actions will not be repeated. Our Heavenly Father operates in the same way. Because He loves us, He disciplines us so we will not commit the same sins or something worse.

Even when seemingly unprovoked trials and tribulations come into our lives, we can benefit from them. Romans 8:28 reads, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” Truly, when we try to compare what we have to go through to what

Jesus endured, we see there is no comparison. He suffered much for us. The question is: What will we suffer through for Him? It is hard for us to lose, to mourn the death of a loved one, to feel the pain of a broken relationship or the discomfort of owing insurmountable debt. Trials will come in this life. Pain will be a part of our pilgrimage. But the good news is we have the perfect example of how to endure as we go through various situations and Jesus will always be there with us. We are never alone.

3. Believers Must Learn to Accept the Discipline of the Lord (vv. 7–11)

The writer of Hebrews presents yet another reason that believers should cheerfully bear affliction when it comes. Christians are encouraged to endure the discipline of the Lord because it is the mark of the sonship of Christ as well as the way to become more holy and righteous.

The Bible is clear that those who suffer for righteousness’ sake glorify God: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:12–13, KJV). 2 Timothy 2:12 says, “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.” The writers insist that we must look on all the hardships of life as the discipline of the Lord sent to work, not for our harm, but for our ultimate and highest good.

It is never pleasant to be corrected and disciplined by Him, but His discipline is a sign of His deep love for us. When the Lord corrects you, see it as proof of His love and His ability to lead you in the right direction. Then pray and ask Him what He is working to teach you. We may respond to the Lord’s discipline in several ways. First, we can accept it with resignation. Second, we can accept it with self-pity, thinking we really don’t deserve it. Third, we can be angry and

resentful toward Him. Or, fourth, we can accept it gratefully, which is the appropriate response we owe a loving Father who cares enough about us to point us in the right direction.

In Focus

As Regina crossed the finish line in the Citywide 5K race she wanted to pinch herself. Was this a dream? Just one year ago, Regina was sitting on the couch binging on snacks and TV shows.

She began to gain weight and have pain in her back. She knew she should start eating healthier and exercising but she just wasn't motivated.

She cried out to God for help.

“Lord, I am so tired of feeling tired all of the time and being in pain, but it is so hard to consistently do what's right. I need your help to make a change so that I can see positive results. Please help me turn things around. In Jesus' name, Amen.”

Once she prayed, Regina seemed determined to do what was necessary to meet her goals. She worked hard not to snack between meals, and she joined a walking group for accountability. Over the next few months, the group progressed from walking to jogging to running and registered for the 5K race together.

As the group congratulated each other on a well-run race Regina looked up, “We did it, thank you, Lord!”

In today's lesson, we see that Jesus set the perfect example as the leader who was tempted but did not give in. He endured the pain and shame of the Cross to achieve the joy and victory of eternal life with God.

The People, Places, and Times

Rome. As the capital city of Italy, it was the center of commerce, culture, and religion. A myriad of religions dotted the social landscape at the time this letter to the Hebrews was circulated. Although there were times when Jews and Christians were expelled from Rome, there were other times when they could worship freely.

Believers in Rome. Scholars are very unsure of the intended audience, but in Hebrews 13:24, the writer sends greetings from those of Italy. The *NIV Study Bible* notes that the writer is passing on greetings from some Italian believers. William Barclay in his *Daily Study Bible* on Hebrews suggests that it was written to a group of Jewish Christians who met in a “house–church” in Rome (Barclay, 6-7). They were a subgroup of the main Christian congregation that had been formed there years earlier. Living in a climate of other religions and cults, their faith was tested constantly. When times were hard—politically, culturally, socially, and economically—the chance was greater that they would be tempted to return to Judaism. It was not easy nor politically correct to be a Christian at this time. Christians in Rome had to deal with the threat of persecution by the Roman authorities; although, none of them had become martyrs like Stephen and others. This happened later under Nero, the emperor. Because they were still alive, the writer encouraged them to continue to run their race and not give up. He reminded them that Jesus never gave up and that they shouldn't either.

Background

Some Bible commentators believe Hebrews was written to a Jewish-Christian congregation in Rome around A.D. 67–70. Others believe it was written to Jews living in Egypt or Palestine. Traditionally, authorship was attributed to the apostle Paul, but modern scholars are unsure of the true identity of the author of this epistle. Some believe Barnabas wrote it, and still others suggest Apollos, a Jew born in Alexandria, which is located in northern Africa. The author wrote the letter in response to the threat that believers might renounce Christianity and revert to Judaism. The writer wanted to inform his vacillating readers that Jesus Christ is superior to the greatest of Judaism's heroes. The writer also wanted to highlight, while reminding

his audience of, the efficacy of Jesus' power of salvation. He emphasizes that whereas the Jewish legal sacrificial system was powerless to remit sins, Jesus, the eternal High Priest, "is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). Furthermore, the writer explained the need for patient endurance amid the persecution and sufferings to which the heirs of eternal salvation are inevitably exposed.

The writer suggests that all Christians emulate Jesus' suffering and patience in anticipation of an eternal reward. One cannot help but notice the metaphors of Greek athletic terms such as "run with patience the race" and "a great cloud of witnesses [spectators]" (Hebrews 12:1, KJV). These Christians were to think of themselves as athletes who possessed endurance in order to ensure victory over the forces of evil. The writer also made it clear that the Christians' secret weapon, needed for victory in spite of trials and tribulations, was unwavering faith.

Search the Scriptures

1. What should inspire Christians to hold on to their faith (Hebrews 12:1)?
2. Why is our Christianity never to be stationary or stagnant (v. 1)?
3. Who should we model ourselves after (v. 2)?
4. What is the end result of God's chastening (vv. 10–11)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What makes Jesus a credible leader? How would you have turned out if the Lord had not chastised you? Think about your children or children you know. Imagine how they would grow up without someone to discipline them.
2. Why is it so hard for Christians to adjust to suffering? Have you been told that once you give your life to Jesus, everything will be all right? How have we been taught into believing that children of God are exempt from suffering?

Lesson in Our Society

Before a professional sports team takes the field, it goes through training camp. Training camp is a fiery trial that most players hate. However, veterans and rookies alike must endure training camp in order to learn new plays, to get into shape, and, most importantly, to learn how to become a disciplined and victorious team.

If we Christians are going to be victorious, we have to endure our own version of training camp. God, our coach (leader), wants to turn us into a well-trained and well-disciplined body of believers. To do that, God allows some adversity into our lives. Christians are like tea bags. In order for our rich and robust flavor to come out, we have to be placed in hot water. The Christians in our text were being tested so that their "flavor" would come out.

Make It Happen

Many great biblical and historical characters had to endure much suffering for the causes they supported, whether it was for the spread of Christianity or in the fight for civil rights. Life is a marathon, not a sprint. If we are going to be successful, individually and collectively, we have to keep our eyes on the prize. Individually, that prize is to become like Jesus Christ; collectively, the prize is to make His Kingdom a reality in our midst. Commit to following Jesus' example of godly discipline even when times are tough and temptation to sin is great. Continue working toward your goals, never giving up and keeping your eyes on the prize.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Hebrews 12:1–11

1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

In this verse, the “great cloud of witnesses” is referring to those persons mentioned in chapter 11. Here, the writer is saying that those who have gone before are examples to others of living the life of faith. God has confirmed their faithfulness, and they can be seen as examples of those who endured. Therefore, in light of our inspiring audience, we must rid ourselves of “every weight” and “run with patience.”

The Greek word for “patience” is *hupomone* (hoo-po-mo-NAY), derived from two Greek words: *hupo* (hoo-PO), meaning “under,” and *meno* (MEN-oh), meaning “to remain.” In other words, the Greek root indicates that by remaining under some trial, we may be molded to fit God’s purposes.

2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

To run the race, one must stay focused on Jesus, as implied here by the use of the Greek word *aphorao* (ah-for-AH-oh), translated as “looking.” To *aphorao* means “to turn the eyes away from other things and fix them on something else”—namely Jesus. We do so because Jesus is the “author” (Gk. *archegos*, ar-khay-GOSS), meaning chief leader, and the “finisher” (Gk. *teleiotes*, tel-i-OT-ace), which means “perfecter” of faith. In other words, Jesus’ life is the perfect example of faith.

The word “endured” comes from *hupomeno* (Gk. hoop-om-EN-oh), meaning “to remain or tarry.” Jesus chose to remain on the Cross and bear the cost of sin to save humanity. Jesus focused on the future and finished the work of our redemption, allowing man to have access to Him (Hebrews 2:10).

4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

Here, the readers are reminded that although they may have suffered great persecution (Hebrews 10:32–34), none have shed blood and died as Jesus did. None had yet become martyrs because of their confession of Jesus as their Messiah or Savior.

5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation that speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: 6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son he receiveth.

In verses 5 and 6, the author quotes Proverbs 3:11–12. The Lord disciplines those He loves. In these verses, the reader is reminded of the parent-child relationship. Undisciplined children are unloved children. The use of the Greek word *paideia* (pahee-DI-ah) means “to nurture” or “give instruction.” The writer is saying that one should not make light of the Lord’s instruction but welcome it as a means of spiritual growth.

7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? 8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

Christians should view trials as a form of divine discipline. Just as a parent would discipline a child so would God deal with the sinner. No wise father or mother would allow his or her children to continue exhibiting bad behavior and not correct it. Therefore, receiving discipline can be viewed as a sign of God's fatherly love.

9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

God, here, is called "the Father of spirits" (an expression that occurs only here in the New Testament) in contrast to the human "fathers of our flesh." The writer makes a comparison between an earthly father and the Heavenly Father. The argument is that if earthly parents discipline us and we respect them for it over the long run, then we should respect our Heavenly Father even more.

10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

Verse 10 points out the difference between human and heavenly discipline. The Greek word for "profit" is *sumphero* (soom-**FEHR**-oh), which means "to help, to be profitable or to be expedient." Our earthly parents discipline us "for a few days," whereas God's discipline gives us an eternal benefit. Human discipline is often inconsistent and sometimes provides a temporary benefit. However, the long-term goal in God's discipline is that we might be "partakers" (Gk. *metalambano*, me-ta-lahm-**BAHN**-oh) of His holiness. Nothing pleases God more than children who grow to emulate Him.

11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

Present discipline seems painful because it is! The purpose of our pain is to produce Christ-like behavior. Sometimes we have to endure painful discipline. The Greek word for "exercised" is *gumnazo* (goom-**NAHD**-zoh), and here it implies exercise of the mind in order to endure persecution. God desires for His children to have fruitful lives, and often, that requires pain and sacrifice.

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Say It Correctly

Beset. bih-SET.

Chasten. CHEY-suhn.

Exhortation. Eg-zawr-TEY-shuhn.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

The Discipline of the Lord
(Job 5:8–18)

TUESDAY

The Death of Sin
(Romans 6:1–11)

WEDNESDAY

The Race for the Prize
(1 Corinthians 9:24–27)

THURSDAY

The Training for Godliness
(1 Timothy 4:6–10)

FRIDAY

The Endurance of the Faithful
(James 5:7–11)

SATURDAY

The Example of Faithfulness
(1 Peter 2:18–25)

SUNDAY

The Pioneer of Faith
(Hebrews 12:1–11)

Notes

Teaching Tips

September 25
Bible Study Guide 4

Words You Should Know

A. Voice (Hebrews 12:19, 26) *phone* (Gk.)—A sound; a tone; speech; the sound of uttered words.

B. Mediator (v. 24) *mesites* (Gk.)—One who intervenes between two others to restore peace and friendship.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Steadfast Thanks. The writer of Hebrews says we do not have to fear death because Jesus Christ brought us forgiveness and the promise of eternal life through His death on Calvary.

A. Pray and ask God for lesson clarity and that students will seek God's forgiveness and the promise of eternal life.

B. Study and reflect on the entire lesson.

O—Open the Lesson

A. After receiving prayer requests, open class with prayer.

B. Discuss students' fears about death and assurance of God's grace.

C. Ask for a volunteer to read the In Focus story and relate the story to today's Aim for Change.

D. Discuss expressions of God's love and forgiveness.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Read the Keep in Mind verse collectively.

B. Ask for volunteers to read the Focal Verses.

C. Use the Background, The People, Places, and Times, and In Depth outline to expand the meaning of today's Focal Verses.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Read and discuss the Make It Happen and Lesson in Our Society sections.

B. Ask the students to suggest ways to share God's forgiveness and the promise of eternal life.

C. Discuss the peace we have because of the assurance of God's grace.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Instruct students to review the Daily Bible Readings to prepare for next week's class.

B. Close with prayer.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Faith Inspires Gratitude

Song: "Give Thanks with
a Grateful Heart"

Devotional Reading:
2 Thessalonians 1:1–7

Faith Inspires Gratitude

Bible Background • HEBREWS 12:14–29

Printed Text • HEBREWS 12:18–29 | Devotional Reading • 2 THESSALONIANS 1:1–7

AIM FOR CHANGE

By the end of the lesson, we will: KNOW the meaning of God’s forgiveness and promise of eternal life; EXPLORE our fears about death and assurances of God’s grace; and REPENT for sometimes rejecting God’s grace.

KEEP IN MIND

“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”
(Hebrews 12:28, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Hebrews 12:18 For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,

19 And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more:

20 (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart:

21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)

22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,

24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

25 See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven:

26 Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.

27 And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

Focal Verses

28 Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:

29 For our God is a consuming fire.

boldly and freely to speak to their Savior without fear. Through Christ, we have the hope of eternal life because He has given us everything we need for forgiveness of sins and redemption under His blood. Now, the believer can live a life in the promise of His Word.

At-A-Glance

1. The Two Mountains: Sinai and Zion (The Heavenly City) (Hebrews 12:18–21)
2. The Heavenly City (Zion or Sion) (vv. 22–23)
3. The Heavenly City and Jesus, the Mediator (v. 24)
4. Criteria for Entering the Heavenly City (vv. 25–26)
5. Preparing for the Heavenly City (vv. 27–29)

2. The Heavenly City Zion (or Sion) (vv. 22–23)

Ancient custom approved special treatment for the firstborn son, who received a father's blessings, which was a double portion. In the Old Testament, Joseph received a double inheritance among the sons of Jacob instead of Reuben, who had unacceptable behavior. The firstborn son received special blessings from his earthly father. The heirs in heaven are believers, who are justified and made perfect because they are in heaven, they are "just men made perfect" (Hebrews 12:23). Through Christ, believers will inherit the Kingdom: "Ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:24). We have the promise of eternal life, our inheritance.

By faith, believers' names are recorded in heaven; they are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Believers can come to the Lord by faith through Christ, make a supplication, and receive absolution for their sins and justification. We have an eternal home in heaven and the blessings of the firstborn. Thus, every believer is an heir with rights and privileges of the firstborn.

In Depth

1. The Two Mountains: Sinai and Zion (The Heavenly City) (Hebrews 12:18–21)

The writer of Hebrews compares the Mosaic Covenant with the New Covenant by examining two mountains: Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. The Lord gave the Law to the Israelites at Mount Sinai with a majestic display of "thunderings, and the lightnings . . . they (the people) removed (themselves) and stood afar off" (Exodus 20:18). The people came before Him with fear and trembling at Mount Sinai. They feared that speaking directly to Him would lead to death.

In contrast, there is a New Covenant with Christian believers. They now have the opportunity to joyfully, through the blood of Jesus, come to Mount Zion, which is the Heavenly City of the Lord. Under the Mosaic Covenant, the children of Israel were scared to speak to their deliverer and savior. Now, the believer can come

3. The Heavenly City and Jesus, the Mediator (v. 24)

Jesus Christ is the mediator or "go-between" uniting two parties: God and sinful humanity. Moses was the mediator of the Mosaic Covenant; he was the liaison between God and the Israelites. Moses gave the Israelites God's

Law, instruction, and the obligations for the covenant between God and the Israelites.

I In the same vein, Jesus is the mediator for the New Covenant that was established through His sacrificial death on the Cross. He helps believers to remain in a covenant relationship. Therefore because of Jesus, humanity has favor and as they pray Jesus's sacrificial blood covers their sins and they can receive new life through Christ, our mediator.

4. Criteria for Entering the Heavenly City (vv. 25–26)

Jesus Christ speaks to humanity and He offers forgiveness through the Lord's grace and mercy. Because we have more knowledge of Christ and the promise of eternal life, "If we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven" we will be judged for our unbelief (Hebrews 12:25). Therefore, our faith in the Lord should inspire our gratitude for all that He's done for us.

When Korah, a Levite who was the tabernacle assistant, instigated a rebellion against Moses and Aaron, the Lord destroyed him. Korah and the other leaders directly challenged Moses and the Lord. As a result, the Lord judged and punished their unbelief. Today, He still judges unbelief. If we do not believe and accept Christ, we refuse Him.

The "whole mountain trembled violently" when He gave the Law at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:18, NIV). When Christ returns, He will "shake not the earth only, but also heaven" (Hebrews 12:26). The entire universe will shake when Jesus returns, but His Kingdom will not be shaken. It will endure through eternity. His power will be evident, and everyone will recognize Him.

5. Preparing for the Heavenly City (vv. 27–29)

The writer of Hebrews explains that temporary things will be shaken and removed when Christ returns, while the eternal things

will not be moved. The "things which cannot be shaken may remain"; they are eternal (Hebrews 12:27). Only His kingdom will last.

Believers will endure the shaking and endure through the grace of God. We will receive the kingdom of God that will endure; it is unchanging and cannot be moved. No power on earth or hell can destroy God's kingdom.

The writer encourages believers to "have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Hebrews 12:28). Grace is the unmerited favor of God that offers the gift of salvation to humanity. We can hold to the grace we have received and trust the assurance that we have an eternal home with God. By grace, we serve God with love and respect. If you have rejected God's grace, repent and receive God's love and mercy today. Then accept the gift He has given you with gratitude.

In Focus

Lamar lay in the hospital bed; he couldn't remember anything. His brother, Warren, said, "Good morning. It has been almost six days since the accident. Do you remember what happened?" Lamar shook his head.

Warren said, "You had a stroke while you were driving. Your car just stopped on the side of the road."

Lamar became frustrated when he tried to lift his right hand. As his wife, Joyce, hugged him, she whispered, "You are paralyzed on your right side. The doctors don't know if it is permanent." Tears ran down Lamar's face.

Each day, Joyce prayed with Lamar, who became withdrawn. One day, Warren visited Lamar at the rehabilitation center.

Warren said, "You know God has His hand on your life. His grace and mercy are so evident. You could be dead, but His grace has allowed you to live. Be thankful!"

Lamar said, "I am not sure. I believe that death would be better than half a life."

Warren said, “You are blessed with life for a purpose. God’s grace has spared you.”

God is gracious and merciful. When we experience difficulty in life, we should trust God.

In today’s lesson, we are reminded to trust God and not fear death but live each day with thankfulness as we experience God’s grace.

The People, Places, and Times

Mosaic Covenant. The Pentateuch (first five books of Old Testament) record the conditions and requirements of the Mosaic Covenant, which was given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai for God’s people, the Israelites. Moses was the liaison between God and the Israelites. Moses communicated God’s requirements for the covenant and pled Israel’s case before God. After God revealed His power and rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, the Mosaic Covenant was conditional based on Israel fulfilling its part of the covenant.

New Covenant. The New Covenant is based on Jesus Christ, the Mediator, who died for the sins of all humanity. Jesus established the New Covenant through His own death and commissioned His disciples and believers to share the Good News. Believers will dwell with Him in the heavenly, Mount Zion (Sion).

Mount Zion. This is a reference to the heavenly city of God and believers who will dwell with Him. It is a celebration of the Holy One where angels, believers, and righteous people dwell.

Background

The majority of the earliest believers in Christ were Jews. When Paul went to Jerusalem, he was told, “Many thousands of Jews there are which believe” (Acts 21:20). The number of Jewish Christians grew, but the church communities endured physical and social persecution from the Jews and Romans. Many people were arrested and ostracized because of their faith, and some

suffered physically and experienced loss of their property because of their belief. The writer of Hebrews expressed the superiority of Christianity and urged believers to keep their eyes on Jesus. The early believers may have considered returning to Judaism to hold on to the biblical truths. The people needed to remember that Jesus was the Messiah and that He would return. The writer of Hebrews wanted the believers to hold onto their faith and look forward to Jesus’ return.

As the believers at the newborn church struggled, disciples who had victoriously run the race gazed at the struggling believers. The writer urged them not to be discouraged by struggles that perfect believers. He also urged them to be very careful and guard against defiling themselves and selling their birthrights, which would result in losing their newfound promises. We must remember our actions have lasting consequences. Although we repent and seek our Savior’s forgiveness, we cannot eliminate the consequences of sin.

Search the Scriptures

1. What was the difference between the shedding of Jesus’ blood and the shedding of Abel’s blood (Hebrews 12:24)?
2. When Jesus returns, the heavens and earth will shake. What and who will remain amid the burning and shaking (v. 27)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. As disciples of the New Covenant, how can we share the meaning of God’s forgiveness and the promise of eternal life?
2. Why do people knowingly reject Jesus Christ and His promise of eternal life?

Lesson in Our Society

According to a recent Gallup poll, 35 percent of Americans said they attend church each week while 20 percent say they do not and 25 percent say they seldom attend. However, the number of

African Americans who say they attend church is much greater—53 percent. The economic turmoil has caused a surge in church attendance. Many people turn to God because of fear, judgment, or uncertainty to find security and seek a firm foundation that the world cannot offer. When believers accept Christ, the eternal promise of new life with Him outweighs their temporary fears. By faith, we focus on the assurances we have through His grace. The firm assurances are not based upon the world but upon His promises. Through His grace, we can experience His continual presence. Receive His grace and experience His presence and His eternal promises.

Make It Happen

The news constantly reports details of natural disasters, economic hardships, and of lives that seem to have little focus on steadfast thankfulness for God. The struggles of life are not the focus in today's lesson. Instead, it is the challenge to be thankful for God's grace even when troubles shake our world. But that grace is only available to those who have turned to Him, repented, and surrendered their life.. Have you made that decision?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Hebrews 12:18–29

18 For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, 19 And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: 20 (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: 21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake)

Beginning from verse 18, the author contrasts the Jewish and Christian ways by juxtaposing the terrors associated with the giving of the law on Mount Sinai with the glory associated with Mount Zion. Although the description in verses 18–21 leaves no doubt that the writer has Sinai in mind, there is no explicit reference to the mountain of revelation. The phenomena listed are all associated with the Sinai event (see Deuteronomy 4:11). Elsewhere, they are all linked with the presence of God: “fire” (Judges 13:20; 1 Kings 18:38), “darkness” (1 Kings 8:12), and “tempest” (Nahum 1:3); the “trumpet” (Hebrews 12:19) are all associated with the End Times when God will manifest Himself (Matthew 24:31; 1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). The picture is one that strikes terror in the heart. He sounds the note of warning that great privilege means great responsibility.

The Israelites were terrified by the experience. They responded to “a sound of words” by pleading that no further message be given to them (Hebrews 12:19b). The writer's statement summarizes Deuteronomy 5:23–27; it particularly reflects on Deuteronomy 5:25, where the people express the fear that they will be consumed by the fire if they continue to listen to the voice (see Exodus 20:18–19).

So they asked that they should hear God's voice no more (Exodus 20:19; Deuteronomy 5:25–27). They were overcome with terror and wanted no further part in the wonderful events. The fearfulness of the giving of the Law on Sinai is mentioned with reference to one of the commands laid on the people, namely, that neither man nor beast should touch the mountain under penalty of death (Exodus 19:13). "The writer [of Hebrews 12:20] focuses upon the most stringent aspect of the command: 'if even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned,' in order to emphasize the gravity of the injunction and the peril of coming before the annihilating holiness of the divine appearing," (Lane, 463). In effect, the command that nothing touch it indicates the holiness of the mountain. Judgment for anyone who ignores the holiness of God is swift and terrible.

Hebrews 12:21 is a further indication of the awe of it all. At the time of the giving of the Law, Moses was the leader of the people. He was known as one who had an especially close relationship with God (Exodus 33:11). Yet, even he was terrified. It was a scary occasion, one that affected all the people and terrified even Moses, the man of God.

22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, 23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

"But" is the strong conjunction that (Gk. *alla*, al-LAH) introduces a marked contrast. Christians order their lives in accordance with a different revelation. Scholar William Lane writes: "In sharp contradistinction from

the scene at Sinai, every aspect of this vision provides encouragement for coming boldly into the presence of God (see 4:16)...An overwhelming impression of the distant God is eclipsed in the experience of full access to the presence of God and of Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant," (Lane, 464-465).

The destination of the Christian pilgrims is described by various evocative images. First, they are "come unto" Mount Zion (Hebrews 12:22). This is to be understood not as the seat of temporal Israel but as a reference to God's eschatological rule through Christ, just as in Revelation 14:1–5. Second, Hebrews 12:22 states that they have come to the "city of the living God," a city with foundations that the patriarchs looked forward to and one that is eternal (13:14). The book of Revelation also uses this image for God's presence, when it speaks of a "holy city" (21:2; 22:19). Third, Hebrews 12:22 says they have come to the "heavenly Jerusalem" a designation that is called "new Jerusalem" in Revelation 3:12.

It should be noted that the City of God, later famously expounded upon by Augustine, is filled with life and contains a more vibrant, dynamic, and powerful sort than is available on earth. Hebrews 12:22 says there are "innumerable" or "countless numbers" (Gk. *urias*, moo-REE-as) of angels who are present as part of the welcoming and celebratory throng. Then we have the church of the firstborn. In verse 23, the Greek word *ekklesia* (ek-klay-SEE-ah), translated as "church," is taken from the common civic life of the Greeks and normally refers to the official gathering of the officials or their representatives. The "firstborn" (Gk. *prototokia*, pro-tot-OK-ee-ah) probably refers to all those "sons" whom God is leading into glory (Hebrews 2:10). Understood this way, it means "the spirits of just men made perfect" (12:23), or the spirits of righteous people. It is another way of describing the same participants

in the true inheritance, which is a participation in God's holiness. In summation, the City of God is filled with angels and saints. The climax is reached in verse 24 with the reference to Jesus, who here is "the mediator of a new covenant." The author does not only affirm the humanity of Jesus and His role as mediator but also places Him definitively at God's side, a place that was His from the beginning (Hebrews 1:1–4). Jesus' blood speaks "a better word" than that of Abel (12:24, NIV). His blood opens up a way into the holiest for people (10:19).

25 See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: 26 Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. 27 And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: 29 For our God is a consuming fire.

The transition from exposition in Hebrews 12:18–24 to exhortation in verses 25–29 is abrupt. The author, with a sharp change in tone, resumes the expression of urgent concern that characterizes verses 14–17. Here, the sternness of the warning is justified by the detailing of the privileged status of Christians in verses 18–24. They have a qualitatively greater responsibility than Israel did to listen attentively to the voice of God. Those who deliberately ignore the eschatological revelation of God and who show contempt for the blessings of the New Covenant cannot possibly escape judgment. The concluding paragraph consists of a sober caution

to listen to what God is saying, a concentration of His word in the form of prophecy, and a final admonition to respond appropriately with gratitude and worship. A tendency toward apathy or complacency is sharply rebuked with the phrase, "Be careful that you do not refuse to listen to the One who is speaking," (12:25, NLT). The form of the statement recalls 3:12, and it connotes a deliberate and culpable refusal to listen to the one speaking. The readers must also be aware that the greater the gift, the greater the responsibility, and the greater the peril involved in its rejection.

In 12:26, the author goes on to recall the solemnity of the events at Sinai. Repeatedly, we are told that then the earth shook (Exodus 19:18; Judges 5:4–5; Psalm 68:8; 77:18; 114:4, 7). The writer of Hebrews has already spoken of the awe-inspiring nature of what happened when the Law was given. Now, the reference to the shaking of the earth brings it all back. At the same time, it enables the author to speak of a promise that involved a further shaking that is recorded in Haggai 2:6. The prophet looked forward to something much grander than Sinai. Then God shook the earth, but Haggai foresaw a day when God would shake "not only the earth but also the heavens" (Hebrews 12:26, NLT). This will be no small event but one of cosmic grandeur. The reference to heaven and earth may be meant to hint at the concept of the New Heaven and the New Earth (Isaiah 66:22). At any rate, it points to the decisive intervention that God will make at the last time.

In Hebrews 12:27, the writer uses the expression "yet once more" (Gk. *eti hapax*, ET-ee HAP-ax) to point out the decisive significance of the things of which the author is writing. There is an air of finality about it all. God is going to make a radical and final change. This is the decisive time. This physical creation can be shaken, and it is set in contrast to what cannot be shaken. These are the things that

really matter, the things that have the character of permanence. The author does not go into detail about the precise nature of the ultimate rest. But whatever it may be, it will separate the things that last forever from those that do not. It is God's will for this final differentiation to be made so that only what cannot be shaken will remain. As Donald Guthrie notes, what the writer is "concerned to demonstrate is that the Christian position, unlike the era of the Mosaic law, leads to a state of absolute stability," (Guthrie, 265).

The ultimate reality of God's sovereignty is evident in verse 28. Believers have received the Kingdom of God, which cannot be shaken. The Kingdom is something we "receive." It is not earned or created by believers; it is God's gift. While not all details are provided in the New Testament, it is clear that the Kingdom is in stark contrast with earthly systems that can and will be shaken. This is untrue of God's kingdom! The author does not simply say that it will not be shaken but that it cannot be. It has a quality found in nothing earthly. It is on the strength of this that the writer gives two exhortations: "let us have grace" and "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." The exhortations could also mean, "Let us be thankful, and let us offer acceptable worship to God." The latter meaning is preferred. The appropriate response to the gift we have received is gratitude to God and acceptable worship, that is, in living a life that is pleasing to God. The qualification "with reverence and godly fear" constitutes a sober reminder of the holy character of God.

The chapter concludes with an expression apparently taken from Deuteronomy 4:24. The author of Hebrews 12 emphasizes that God is not to be trifled with. It is easy to be so taken up with the love and compassion of God that we overlook His implacable opposition to all evil. The wrath of God is not always a popular subject today, but it looms large in biblical teaching. Because God is in fact a consuming fire, we do best to come to Him on His terms.

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Say It Correctly

Moses. **MOH**-ziz, -zis.
Zion. **ZI**-uhn.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Listening to the Voice of Warning
(Ezekiel 33:1–9)

TUESDAY

Listening to the Spirit
(Revelation 3:1–13)

WEDNESDAY

Anticipating a Better Covenant
(Hebrews 8:1–7)

THURSDAY

Giving Thanks for the Faithful
(2 Thessalonians 1:1–7)

FRIDAY

Loving with God’s Kind of Love
(Matthew 5:43–48)

SATURDAY

Pursuing Peace and Holiness
(Hebrews 12:12–17)

SUNDAY

Offering Acceptable Worship
(Hebrews 12:18–29)

Notes
