

From the Presider's Desk



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

Mother Brooks and I send our warmest love and greetings to you all. The year continues to move quickly, with much happening around the world, and we are more than confident in the signs that point to the soon coming return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I have an assurance that we are in the Last Days, and it is critical that we continue to build up our faith and live a holy and acceptable life before the Lord. Truly, we must learn more about the Word of God, live consecrated and holy, so that we can be caught up with Him when He returns. I cannot stress enough the importance of Christian Education in these perilous, yet hopeful, times. Though our Christian Education classrooms have looked differently over the last few years, Mother Brooks and I pray that you have found a space in your life to dive deep into the Word of God. Truly, we have seen the desperate need to learn more of the Lord, and therefore to know more of His Word, for to know His Word is to know Him.

As we look all around us for the many happenings, global events, and signs of the Last Days prophesied all throughout Scriptures, we see the critical need to hold fast to our faith. Yet, this is not just any kind of faith. We have a Living Faith, a faith that is grounded deep in the truth of the revelation of Jesus Christ, a faith that is as living as our Lord and Savior indeed lives. It is the truth of our faith, our Apostolic faith, that we must hold to without doubt or hesitation. The world needs our faith. We have been challenged on many sides, especially throughout this pandemic. Faith is what held us together when we thought to lose hope, faith is what kept our communities grounded, and it is faith that we must continue to hold fast to as we see further signs of the last days. For with the knowledge that we are in the last days also comes the assurance that the Lord will pour out His Spirit upon all flesh in ways we have never seen before. Therefore, I live with deep faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, His promises for our lives, His protection over His people, and the promise that He will soon return for a Church that ought to be ready and waiting for Him.

I pray that you enjoy this quarter of study, and that you are enlightened and enriched through the Word of God. His Word strengthens us, His Word edifies us, His Word transforms us. How I love to study the Word of God! I pray you find love for study also! Mother and I love you to life, and we are praying for each of you.

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!

Welcome to the September Edition of the Apostolic Light. I greet you in the matchless name of Jesus Christ. As Children of God, I am excited in Him and my prayer is that our faith is unwavering, our doctrine is uncompromised, and that each one of our students and educators increases in demonstration and power.

In today's society, education in the Word of God is of utmost importance. There are so many influences coming from all directions, and a Godly education in the Word of God will help us decipher what we should take as true, and what we should take with a grain of salt. A biblical education provides our students with a greater insight and comprehension of God's Word.

A LIVING FAITH

During this quarter, we will study and examine Faith, specifically discussing the topic of a 'Living Faith.' As believers, we show our faith by being obedient to God's word. When we are alone and when we are around others, we need to be a living, walking testament to God's grace, power and love. Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph were all listed in Hebrews 11 as men of faith. They all showed their faith in God when He gave them instructions; they showed their faith by their actions.

True, living faith leads to action. It is not just intellectual agreement or an emotional act, but it is obedience to His will. And this obedience should not be an isolated event; it should continue throughout our lives to bring about a change. Real faith, dynamic faith, LIVING faith results in a completely changed life.

As we look to this next quarter, may you be reminded that we must live a life of faith - from first to last, for "therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith." (Romans 1:17). May we continue learning and growing, always pressing on toward the mark!

Blessings,

Evangelist Neechy Dumas
P.A.W. Marketing & Publications Director
@Neechy

Department of Publications of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World



Praise the Lord, and Greetings in the Magnificent Name of Jesus Christ!

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

The theme for this Apostolic Light Sunday School Fall Quarter is Faith: A Living Faith. We are excited to dive into this study of God’s Word. Scripture goes on to say that without faith, it is impossible to please God. (verse 6)

Read this excerpt from an online source regarding the importance of faith:

“Basically...if we have faith, then we know for sure that everything we’re hoping for and dreaming of will eventually come true. Even though we can’t see the path ahead of us, faith tells us the road will be a smooth one.” (shmoop.com)

Enjoy your study, and inspire others, as well!

We are blessed to have such supportive leadership! Presiding Bishop Theodore L. Brooks, Sr., Board of Bishops, and Executive Officers, thank you for your prayerful support! To our Pastors, Sunday School Superintendents, Teachers, and Students we say thank you! You have choices in your Christian Education resources; thank you for choosing the Apostolic Light Sunday School materials!

Blessings always,

Dr. Ruth A. Tyson Newton
Editor—*Apostolic Light* Sunday School Resources

International Christian Education Association of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World



Greetings Christian Educators,

We are beginning our fall quarter of our journey in teaching God's Word. The fall season brings many marvelous changes in nature, which causes us to marvel at the greatness of God, our Creator.

It is imperative that we make sure that we rightly divide the Word so the hearers will know and understand that the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Jesus: for he is our LORD! "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him." We should note the use of the singular personal pronouns. John 1:3, 10 makes it clear that creation was the work of one divine person. "The world was made by him" Isaiah 44:24 is crystal clear on this point. God speaks in the first person and says, "I am the LORD . . . that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself." Could this speak any plainer? Creation is the work of one divine person only. (Additional Scriptures to review James 2:19; Malachi 2:10.)

We must continue to share the Word and make an impact in the lives of those we teach for surely Jesus is soon to return as our Lord and savior!

Standing firm in the Word,

Dr. Barbara Payne
ICEA President

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.

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.

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.

Self-Study Guide

LESSON AIM

We will discuss how Jesus' sacrificial death opens the way to experience God's presence, reflect on the importance of holding on to faith in Jesus, and explore the value in believers spending time with one another regularly.

I. EXAMINING SCRIPTURE

1. Specifically, according to today's passage, what has Jesus done for us?

2. In what kinds of situations do you find it most difficult to trust God? How do you handle your doubt?

3. What personal value do you place in "meeting together" with other Christians? Why do you think meeting together with other believers is so important to God?

II. MAKING APPLICATIONS

The judgment of God is different from the world's judgment, and followers of Jesus look forward to His return for that judgment to receive their eternal rewards. Ask your group members to consider how they think the world will be different at the second coming of Jesus and how they feel about those changes.

Have your group members discuss times when their faith was challenged, and when they felt like the thread that was their faith might snap. Encourage group members to share what they did in response to that time, guiding them in such a way that their sharing can communicate helpful truths to the group.

III. DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Present the DAILY BIBLE READINGS listed in the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE.

IV. CLOSING IN PRAYER

Close in prayer, asking God to help you stay encouraged in your faith even when you face doubts.

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:

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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)

Self-Study Guide

LESSON AIM

By the end of this lesson, participants will have delved deeply into the meaning of faith and its implications for their lives, developed an appreciation for God's constant presence, and learned how to continue to develop a practice of relying on God for positive change.

I. EXAMINING SCRIPTURE

1. When does the psalmist say that God is a "very present help?" What does that teach you about the Christian journey?

2. If someone asked you what faith is, how would you define it?

3. Think about how the entire universe was formed by God's verbal command. How should this knowledge help us with our faith in Christ?

II. MAKING APPLICATIONS

Ask your students to do a little research to find three remote countries they have never heard of or know very little about. Then, ask them to find out the unique problems that the inhabitants may have and to pray with someone for the answers to manifest themselves for the people. Pray that God would send help, and that the people would come to know God and constantly grow in their faith in Him.

III. DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Present the DAILY BIBLE READINGS listed in the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE.

IV. CLOSING IN PRAYER

Lord, I thank you for your presence in my life. I thank you that my doubt does not keep you from meeting me where I am. Help me to grow in faith, trusting that you are able to meet my every need and that you are in control of my life.

In Jesus name,
Amen

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:

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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

Self-Study Guide

LESSON AIM

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to describe how to have enduring faith, learn how endurance strengthens faith, and develop a plan to use faith to determine and reach spiritual goals.

I. EXAMINING SCRIPTURE

1. Whether it is positively or negatively, how has God's discipline affected your faith?

2. Who are the people you think of when you read about the cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 12:1?

3. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 119:71 that it was good for him that he was afflicted. Can you think of a "life lesson" that you know you learned only because God allowed you to learn it the "hard way?"

II. MAKING APPLICATIONS

Invite your group members to list three groups that they believe would benefit from the knowledge contained in Hebrews 12. Challenge them to collaborate on ways they can share this knowledge with any friends they may have across the globe. Start a prayer post or group message asking for God's help where people can contribute prayers.

Godly discipline is not a popular topic. Talk with your class about why this is so, and encourage them to discuss their own personal fears, which may come from a lack of understanding. Then remind them of what Hebrews 12 says about exactly why God disciplines "His" children and just how much He loves us.

III. DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Present the DAILY BIBLE READINGS listed in the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE.

IV. CLOSING IN PRAYER

Lord, help me to remember the believers who have gone before me in the journey of faith. Give me endurance to stay faithful when things are challenging.

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:

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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

Self-Study Guide

LESSON AIM

We will learn what it means to fear God, understand what it means when we say that God's Kingdom is unshakable, and examine our level of gratitude when coming to the realization of how much Christ has done for us.

I. EXAMINING SCRIPTURE

1. According to today's text, what caused the Israelites to experience fear and trembling when receiving the first covenant?

2. What does it mean to worship God with holy fear and awe?

3. We learned today that we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. What does that mean to you? What are some earthly things that can be "shaken?"

II. MAKING APPLICATIONS

Have participants brainstorm ways they can reverse the cycle of devaluing words like "awesome" through overuse. What other words do we devalue in our society today that used to have sacred meanings?

Have your students make a list of some things they have owned of which they had an old one and then got a new one. You can help them with examples such as an old phone being replaced by a new phone, or an old car being replaced by a new car. Have them reflect on the story from the student magazine, where Sasha's old job was replaced by a new and better job. Have students think about how differently they treated the new object versus the old. Challenge them to remember the reverence and awe that the Israelites showed God in the Old Covenant, and how much more reverently we should treat God now that we are recipients of the New Covenant.

III. DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Present the DAILY BIBLE READINGS listed in the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE.

IV. CLOSING IN PRAYER

Lord, help me receive the newness of relationship with God through Christ in love rather than fear.

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:

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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
