

Quarter At-A-Glance

September 2022

A Living Faith

This 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 that is revealed in Jesus. 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 the presence of God 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 in Christ Jesus, 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, in Christ Jesus, 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.

Black History September 2022

MELVIN E. BANKS

(October 15, 1934–February 13, 2021)

A Man with Vision and the Faith to See it Through

Dr. Melvin Eugene Banks, Sr. was born on October 15, 1934 in Birmingham, Alabama to the union of Jerry and Survilla Banks. Banks was the youngest of two children born to this union. Banks was raised in a blended household with his mother; Aunt, Zerlean Jackson; sister, Margaret Banks; and cousins, Gilbert Williams; Walter Williams; and Martye Jackson.



Banks was educated in the Birmingham Public School System, and graduated from Parker High School in 1952. In 1955, he graduated from Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. In 2008, he was named Alumnus of the Year.

While attending Moody Bible Institute, Banks attend church at South Side Gospel Chapel.

On November 5, 1955, Banks married Olive Perkins. They had three children, Melvin Eugene, Jr.; Patrice Janene; and Reginald Scott.

Banks then attended Wheaton College and earned his BA in Theology and MA in Biblical Studies. He was later awarded an Honorary Doctorate by Wheaton College and served as a board member of the institution. In June of 2021, Wheaton College named its Welcome Center after Banks.

After graduation, Banks was employed by Scripture Press Publications, Inc. He left Scripture Press with a blessing and a little financial backing that helped him and his wife start Urban Ministries, Inc. (UMI) in 1970. For the first twelve years, UMI operated out of the basement of their home on the South Side of Chicago.

Over the fifty years of leadership of Banks, UMI has grown to be the largest independent African American -owned and -operated religious publishing company in the nation.

Banks, LeRoy Yates, Sr., and Harvey Rollerson, Jr. established Westlawn Gospel Chapel on the west side of Chicago. Banks was also involved in the founding of Circle Y Ranch Bible Camp in Bangor, Michigan, in 1964. Banks was awarded the Kenneth N. Taylor Lifetime Achievement Award in 2017. He has also received many other commendations for his work.

Banks made his transition home on February 13, 2021.

Source:
Urban Ministries, Inc.

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 presence of God in a new and life-giving way.

A. Read the Bible Background and Devotional Readings.

B. Complete Lesson 1 in the *Precepts For Living*® Study Guide.

C. Reread the Focal Verses in the NLT.

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 in Christ, 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 Liberating Lesson 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 the presence of God; FEEL the importance of holding on to faith in Jesus; and SHARE our faith with others.

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.

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.

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. God took away the Levitical sacrificial system, which was the first arrangement, when He established the perfect sacrifice—Jesus Christ.

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 God. 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, permitting anyone to enter the holiest of all—God's presence. The high priest was no longer required for believers to be forgiven. By a "new and living way" (Hebrews 10:20), believers can go directly to God through faith in Christ.

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 God. Christ shed His blood to give humanity the ability to come before God's presence by faith. Our High Priest is Jesus Christ, who experienced the pain, temptations, and trials that we experience as believers. By the righteousness of Christ, the Superior Priest, we can approach God 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 God that is only available through Christ, the Superior Priest?

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

Through Christ, we can freely enter into the presence of God. 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 God to experience the fullness of relationship with Him. We must give ourselves completely to God and maintain a personal relationship with Jesus.

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 God after receiving the truth and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The writer does not refer to an occasional act of sin. God sent Jesus to die for our sins; "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 God'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 God 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 God’s mercy, he or she will receive God’s 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 through Christ, are saved and have nothing to fear.

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?

Liberating Lesson

Faith is effective when we depend on God 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 God 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 God’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 doubts and concerns that the world presents. The world is temporary, but our life with God is eternal. Each day we must trust God and hold on to our faith and then share our faith with others. When we share our love for God, we can encourage others and introduce them to a new life through Christ.

Application for Activation

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 can be important, but as Christians, our focus is greater. 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 God. Volunteer

your time to share your love for God with people who do not know Him or share your faith and encourage believers who are homebound or sick. Help others to remain faithful and experience the presence of God each day. Make a daily affirmation to share your faith. Finally, ask God for boldness to share your faith with others. God will give you the opportunity and bless your desire to be faithful.

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 God. 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. But Christians can approach God confidently, completely at home in the situation created by Christ's saving work. 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. His pierced side is the way to the holiest. 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 function of the priest was to build a bridge between humanity and God. This means that Jesus not only shows us the way to God, but also when we get there, He introduces us to His very presence. The house or family of God is the Christian Church, or all true believers in the Lord Jesus.

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.

The consideration of what Christ has done should move 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 Christ has done for us, we should approach God in deep sincerity. The “full assurance of faith” stresses that it is only by trust in Christ, 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 Christ 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-ooos-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 in Christ. 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 God's 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 in Christ. 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)

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 Psalms, 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. Complete Lesson 2 in the *Precepts For Living*® Study Guide.

D. 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 Liberating Lesson 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.

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.

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.

Psalms 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.

The People, Places, and Times

Sons of Korah. Psalms 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.

Psalms. The book of Psalms is a series of five collections: Book I (Psalms 1–41), Book II (Psalms 42–72), Book III (Psalms 73–89), Book IV (Psalms 90–106) and Book V (Psalms 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. Psalms 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 “Psalms” 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 God’s greatest promise—Jesus Christ—the Messiah, who fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. 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 heroes 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.

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 (vv. 8–11)

In Depth

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

The writer of Hebrews begins chapter 11 with a description of faith as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). The reality of faith is what is “hoped for.” Our prayers and hopes are based upon the promises of God. With a firm persuasion and expectation, the writer encouraged the believers to trust that God will perform what He has promised through Christ. We cannot see the future, nor do we know what will happen tomorrow, but our confidence is based upon the certainty of God’s trustworthiness. To encourage struggling believers to hold to the superiority of their faith in Christ, the writer refers the believers to the elders of the Old Testament (Hebrews 11:2). The “elders” received a “good report,” which was the evidence that they would receive the promise of participating in God’s kingdom when it arrives in its fullness. Their actions revealed a genuine faith that will bring honor to the ancient believers.

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 a confident and certain hope in God because He is ever present. Do you have certain 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, NLT). By faith, we believe in God and trust with certainty the future promises that He has revealed.

The heroes of faith 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.

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 encourage readers not to fear. How can we maintain a quiet confidence in the midst of economic turmoil, natural disasters, and continual wars?

Liberating Lesson

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?

Application for Activation

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 study 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 of “the elders” (Gk. *presbuteros*, pres-BOO-ter-os), a term that may be used of age or dignity. These men 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 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 simply say 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, NIV). 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 "times of 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, NLT). 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. 3, NIV). 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, 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
