

August 15  
Lesson 11 (NIV)

## A PATIENT, PERSEVERING FAITH

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 40:1–13

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 10:19–39

### Hebrews 10:23–36

<sup>23</sup> Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

<sup>26</sup> If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, <sup>27</sup> but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. <sup>28</sup> Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. <sup>29</sup> How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? <sup>30</sup> For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.” <sup>31</sup> It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

<sup>32</sup> Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. <sup>33</sup> Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. <sup>34</sup> You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. <sup>35</sup> So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.

<sup>36</sup> You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.



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## KEY VERSE

*Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.* —**Hebrews 10:23**

## CONFIDENT HOPE

### Unit 3: Faith Gives Us Hope

LESSONS 10–13

## LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the nature of the Old Testament passages used to support the writer's argument.
2. Explain why deliberate sin equates to treating Christ's blood as unholy.
3. Make a plan to be an example that encourages fellow believers to be more committed to their service to Christ.

## LESSON OUTLINE

## Introduction

- A. The Challenge of Faithfulness
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Hold Fast (Hebrews 10:23–27)
  - A. Profession of Belief (v. 23)
    - Faith and Honest Doubt*
  - B. Provocation to Love (vv. 24–25)
  - C. Prospect of Judgment (vv. 26–27)
- II. Don't Falter (Hebrews 10:28–31)
  - A. Despising Moses' Law (v. 28)
  - B. Contempt for the Spirit (vv. 29–31)
- III. Remember the Past (Hebrews 10:32–36)
  - A. Pain of Persecution (v. 32–34)
    - Old Mr. Pershing*
  - B. Patient Confidence (vv. 35–36)

## Conclusion

- A. The Challenge for Every Age
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

# Introduction

## A. The Challenge of Faithfulness

Options. Choice. Variety. These are values that culture embraces. We see this clearly in the options that are presented to us in any grocery store. But this also applies to commitments that are much more meaningful than what kind of breakfast cereal we're going to buy. In the realms of values, spirituality, political ideologies, relationships, career paths, and so forth, we are presented with a bewildering array of choices. The culture in which we live encourages experimentation with all of them as well as a hesitancy to commit to any of them.

In this way of thinking, the only real mistake is to limit one's options or to give up on some options in favor of others. All of this can make the path of Christian discipleship very difficult. In choosing to follow Christ, we turn our back on many other options, many other choices. We may be surprised to learn that the first-century writer of Hebrews has something to say to twenty-first-century Christians in this regard!

## B. Lesson Context

What is often called the *letter* to the Hebrews has almost none of the usual characteristics of an ancient letter, apart from a couple of brief greetings at the end (see [Hebrews 13:24–25](#)). Instead, the letter relies heavily on action verbs that have to do with speaking and listening; this serves to suggest that we are listening in as a preacher speaks to an audience (examples: [2:5](#); [6:9](#); [9:5](#)).

It seems best to understand Hebrews as a first-century *sermon*. The phrase “word of exhortation” ([Hebrews 13:22](#)) is the same used in [Acts 13:15](#):

After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak.”

This further bolsters the theory that Hebrews, like the spoken word in Acts, was primarily an oral address. Indeed, 13 of the New Testament’s 19 uses of the underlying Greek word for exhortation occur in Hebrews. It is possible that a listener wrote the sermon down so that it could be passed along as a letter to believers.

Arguing for too clean a distinction between written and oral communication would be a mistake, however. There is no reason this document could not have been written as a sermon to be delivered as a letter and then read aloud. In truth, either direction we choose brings us to improved insight into the overall structure of the work.

There is broad agreement that the long central section of the letter is devoted to the main arguments that the preacher is trying to make to his audience. One compelling outline divides the letter this way:

- 1—Introduction ([1:1–2:4](#))
- 2—Main Proposition ([2:5–9](#))
- 3—Arguments ([2:10–12:27](#))
- 4—Final Exhortation ([12:28–13:21](#))
- 5—Epistolary Postscript ([13:22–25](#))

Today’s text lies at a point of transition from exposition to exhortation. That is the significance of the word *therefore* in [Hebrews 10:19](#). That verse and the two that follow form a crescendo of the doctrinal exposition that then resolves into practical exhortation beginning in [10:22](#).

Our opening verses ([Hebrews 10:23–25](#)) are usually understood to be part of a larger unit inclusive of [10:19–25](#). In light of that, a brief word about [10:19–22](#) is in order. This section is part of a larger doctrinal argument about the nature of sacrifice and the superiority of Jesus’ sacrifice over the animal sacrifices stipulated under the old covenant (see [7:1–10:25](#)). The doctrinal expositions at the heart of this sermon are each followed by a word of exhortation from the preacher to his audience (example: [7:1–10:25](#) followed by [10:26–39](#)).

# I. Hold Fast

(HEBREWS 10:23–27)

## A. Profession of Belief (v. 23)

**23. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.**

Our text opens with an exhortation that follows on the first one (see [Hebrews 10:22](#), not in our printed text). What exactly is the preacher encouraging his hearers to do? Given the vivid baptismal imagery of the previous verses, *the hope we profess* seems best understood as a reference to the baptismal confession. Confession was always part of baptism for the first Christians. It was a kind of public vow of commitment to Jesus and the gospel about him. We cannot, of course, know the exact content of that confession. But both Scripture and early Christian writings suggest that the earliest confessions centered around the person and work of Jesus. Those included his divine status and saving work on behalf of sinful humanity.

Swerving from the faith, and thereby falling into apostasy, was exactly the danger that motivated the preacher to deliver this message in the first place. But we should not understand him merely to be pointing an accusing finger at his audience. He understood their circumstances and how strong the temptation to waver, to give up the fight, was for them. So he pointed them to Jesus, reminding them that their faithfulness could not be based on their own meager strength. Rather, it had to be rooted in the prior faithfulness of Jesus himself.

### *What Do You Think?*

What is a wrong way to demonstrate faith when a wave of life crashes your way?

### *Digging Deeper*

Without giving directive advice, how would you counsel a fellow believer who is demonstrating such a wrong approach?

## ***FAITH AND HONEST DOUBT***

I don't know nearly as much nowadays as I did when I graduated from college! Of course, I jest. But I have learned to be more humble about what I know. Sometimes what "the Bible says" is actually my limited perspective causing me to read into the Bible what I want it to say.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, in his poem "In Memoriam," put it this way: "There lives more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds." I think I know what Tennyson meant. Merely citing what we know we're "supposed to believe" is not nearly as faithful as actually wrestling with the Scripture when it challenges us.

The question, of course, concerns the difference between "holding unswervingly" and

wavering. Here's an interesting test to give yourself: When was the last time the Bible changed your mind about ... anything?

—C. R. B.

## B. Provocation to Love (vv. 24–25)

### **24. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,**

The author's exhortation continues. The phrase *consider how we may spur one another on* means something like “pay attention to each other” or “focus your minds on helping one another.”

This exhortation reminds us that the Christian life is not—cannot be—solely an individual affair. We do not follow the path of discipleship on the basis of our individual determination alone. We have help, support, and encouragement along the way. Indeed, part of being a disciple is offering help and encouragement to each other.

This is not simply a general call for helpfulness. It has specific purpose. Believers are to *spur one another on toward love and good deeds*. The one defines the other: *love* is not to be understood here as a vague, positive emotion, or merely good feelings toward another person. Love is concrete: it is defined by the doing of *good deeds* (see [Matthew 25:31–46](#); [James 2:8–13](#)).

**25. not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**

It is important to understand [Hebrews 10:24](#) and [25](#) together. The stirring up to love and good deeds primarily takes place in *meeting together*. Love, good deeds, and the worship assembly are a package deal, so to speak. We cannot isolate one of the three and hold it up as the sole focus of the Christian life. According to the preacher of this sermon, love and good deeds are synonymous, and they grow out of worship.

This may sound strange, especially to readers who are accustomed to hearing this verse used to elevate church attendance as the pinnacle of the individual Christian's responsibilities. For the preacher of this ancient sermon, participation in the worship assembly was not merely a box to be checked off. Rather, worship is about identity formation.

This was especially true for the people to whom this message was first addressed. Many of them were feeling social pressure to give up on their commitment to Jesus. This manifested itself in a tendency to distance themselves from the community. But the community relied on participation in order to endure in the face of these pressures.

Worship is doubly important in light of *the Day* that is *approaching*. The author of these words understood worship in climactic terms. Worship deals with the true nature of reality, most especially the cosmic reality of God's reign over all things. That fact was especially

important for a group of people who were beginning to disbelieve in the reality of that claim.

The Day approaching is meant to point to Jesus' second coming, or the Day of Judgment. That will be the time when the God's kingdom will come in its fullness and his purposes for humanity and all of creation will be fully revealed. The language of *approaching*, or arrival, can be seen in other passages (see [Matthew 3:2](#); [4:17](#); [Mark 1:15](#); [Romans 13:12](#); [James 5:8](#)).

#### *What Do You Think?*

How many times per month should you attend church services in order to honor the intent of [Hebrews 10:25](#)? Why do you say that?

#### *Digging Deeper*

How do you answer that question without

## VISUALS FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (see example on page [429](#)) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Summer Quarter. That packet also contains the very useful *Presentation Tools* CD for teacher use. Order No. 4629121 from your supplier.

### C. Prospect of Judgment (vv. 26–27)

**26. If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left,**

These words hearken back to [Hebrews 6:4–8](#). Many in the preacher's audience seem to have been in danger of turning away from the faith because of the social pressures coming at them from their families. The cost of living the faith, in other words, was becoming too great for them to bear. The idea behind receiving *the knowledge of the truth* is found in the letters of the apostle Paul (see [1 Timothy 2:4](#); [2 Timothy 2:25](#); [Titus 1:1](#)). It is a way of describing one's entry into the church and its commitments.

To sin *deliberately* after having come to Christ carries the grave consequences of being cut off from the positive benefits of Christ's *sacrifice for sins*. Furthermore, if we assume that the preacher is speaking to wavering believers who wanted to return to Judaism, it also meant that the old rituals were cut off from them. Having been in Christ, they had come to know that animal sacrifices did not purify. So how could any sacrifice for sins remain for them?

**27. but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.**

Those who continue to sin willfully can anticipate *judgment and a raging fire* (also [Hebrews 9:27](#); [12:29](#)). The word *fearful* reminds us of that word's two senses: the Christian's fear of God is that of reverent respect; the unbeliever's lack of fear now will become one of terror when

judgment arrives. Faithful fear of God drives out fear of everything else (see 2:15; 11:23, 27). But disobeying God should put people in fear because they have become his *enemies* through their own actions.

## II. Don't Falter (HEBREWS 10:28–31)

### A. Despising Moses' Law (v. 28)

**28.** Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

The preacher now takes a different tack, appealing to an Old Testament example to support his warning about the danger of apostasy. The word translated *rejected* is also translated the same way in [Luke 7:30](#), and that is the sense here. To reject *the law of Moses* was to commit apostasy.





Visual for Lesson 11. While posing the discussion question associated with verse 25, ask learners how (non-)attendance affects their faith.

**Deuteronomy 17** describes the punishment for an Israelite who was “doing evil in the eyes of the Lord your God in violation of his covenant” by committing idolatry (17:2). Such a person was to be put to death “on the testimony of two or three witnesses” (17:6; compare 19:15). The phrasing *without mercy* is not found in this passage. But the idea is found in **Deuteronomy 13:6–10**. There a similar situation is addressed: the one who tempts others to idolatry is to be stoned: “Do not yield to them or listen to them. Show them no pity” (13:8; see also **Deuteronomy 19:19–21**). The reason why the preacher mentions this becomes clear in the next verse, below.

### B. Contempt for the Spirit (vv. 29–31)

**29. How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?**

The reason for **Hebrews 10:28** becomes clear as we recognize the lesser-to-greater form of argument now in view (see also **Hebrews 2:1–4**). Here it takes the form of “if X was bad, just think how much worse Y will be.” That is, if the consequences of apostasy were dire under the old covenant, consider how much worse those consequences are under the new *covenant* of Jesus Christ!

Apostasy is a rejection of the *Spirit of grace*. That is a rare phrase in the Bible, found only here and in **Zechariah 12:10**. In both instances, the phrase assumes that grace is divine empowerment. Grace is sometimes understood as the free gift of God that comes no-strings-attached. But grace is more than that. Grace empowers us to take up our crosses and follow Christ, giving us the strength to undertake the path of discipleship and service to others in his name. Think of all that is being given up when one rejects the Spirit of grace!

We need the Spirit’s empowerment today just as ancient believers did. Like those to whom this letter was originally written, we are weak and frail, prone to wander, and prone to look for an easier way.

#### *What Do You Think?*

Beginning with logic rather than quoting Scripture, how would you respond to someone who believes that God’s loving nature means we can keep doing whatever we want?

#### *Digging Deeper*

What if the person mentioned Samson as an example of someone who did as he pleased yet still enjoyed God’s favor?

**30. For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.”**

The terrible consequences for apostasy, which is the same as having “trampled the Son of God underfoot” (10:29). Such consequences are certain for the preacher and his audience because they *know him* who has spoken. Because God spoke the words they will certainly come to pass. The two quotations here are substantially drawn from [Deuteronomy 32:35–36](#), although neither is an exact quotation of the text.

*What Do You Think?*

What area of life do you most need to give to the Lord in letting him judge rather than you trying to do so yourself?

*Digging Deeper*

What passages in addition to [1 Corinthians 6:7](#) will help you most in this regard? Why?

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

This statement reiterates the point first made in [Hebrews 10:26–27](#) (see above). The phrase *the living God* occurs more often in this book than anywhere else in the Bible (see [3:12](#); [9:14](#); [12:22](#)). This God—the only God there is—sweeps away all gods of wood and stone, which are no gods at all ([2 Kings 19:18](#); [Isaiah 37:19](#)). He is true to his word, and the consequences of apostasy will come to pass.

### III. Remember the Past

([HEBREWS 10:32–36](#))

#### A. Pain of Persecution (vv. [32–34](#))

**32. Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering.**

In challenging his hearers and readers to *remember those earlier days*, the preacher is using the strongest exhortation available to him in the Greek language as used in Old and New Testaments. (Less strong versions appear in [Mark 11:21](#); [14:72](#); [1 Corinthians 4:17](#); [2 Corinthians 7:15](#); and [2 Timothy 1:6](#).)

We should take care to point out that the preacher was not asking them to remember “the good ol’ days” with fondness. The challenge to remember is not that of passively recalling information. Rather, it is an act that forms one’s identity in order to act in light of “lessons learned” from important events past.

Those *earlier days after you had received the light* are especially important for the preacher’s

overall argument. Even back then, his hearers had suffered greatly. The sufferings of their present moment, then, were not new. The readers had been through it before, and they had faithfully endured. If they could bear up once, they could bear up twice. The idea of light is associated with God's love or salvation in the psalms ([Psalms 27:1](#); [44:3](#); [78:14](#)).

### OLD MR. PERSHING

When I was a teenager, my family lived in an old house in Minneapolis. Around the corner lived Mr. Pershing, whom we frequently saw sitting on his front porch. Sometimes we would go over and talk to him. My brothers and I thought of him as incredibly elderly, so we called him “Old Mr. Pershing”—but not to his face.

A few years ago, my brother Dave and I were visiting Minneapolis, and we went by our old home. As we walked around the corner, there sat Old Mr. Pershing on his front porch! We walked up and chatted with him. Once back in our car, my brother and I broke out laughing. We each knew what the other was thinking: *We are both older than Mr. Pershing was when we started calling him “Old Mr. Pershing!”*

Remembering the past gives us perspective. It's as true for us today as it was to the first-century Christians. What has remembering your personal history taught you about walking with God today and tomorrow? What should it?

—C. R. B.

**33–34.** Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

Here the writer got specific about the former days ([Hebrews 10:32](#), above). Members of his audience had suffered directly, and they had also suffered by being *side by side with* those who suffered persecution. The Greek word behind *publicly exposed* only occurs in this verse and includes the idea of being made a spectacle as one is put on public display. They became the targets of insults and other ways of being persecuted.

### B. Patient Confidence (vv. 35–36)

**35–36.** So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

In the final two verses of today's text, the author turned to the importance of perseverance. Those who are tempted to reject the Christ they once accepted should have *confidence*

because they know who God is and what he has done for them. That confidence is the basis of the ability *to persevere* that will result in retaining the promise of resurrection and eternal life with Jesus.

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. ([Hebrews 4:1](#); compare [9:15](#)).

*What Do You Think?*

Which part of today's lesson do you struggle with most? Why?

*Digging Deeper*

What action will you take this week to remedy this problem?

## Conclusion

### A. The Challenge for Every Age

The story of the audience of the letter to the Hebrews is the story of God's people throughout history. From the days after Pharaoh released the Hebrews from bondage onward, we see the fickleness in God's people in remaining faithful. In many ways, it was no different for the first century church.

And it is no different for us today. Cultural pressures may vary from place to place and across the centuries, but the challenge of faithfulness remains. By keeping our eyes trained on God's promises in hope, we can remain faithful to the very end and receive everything God desires for us. "Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" ([Hebrews 12:1](#)).

### B. Prayer

Father, in the midst of strong pressures, grant us strength to remain faithful to your Son through the Spirit of grace. May we seek each day to live a life worthy of our calling in him. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

God's promises are certain for all who walk the difficult path of faith.

## INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#) (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the [NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition](#)).

## Into the Lesson

Ask for shows of hands regarding students identifying with one of these two statements:

- 1—Patient perseverance seems to come easier for me than for most others.
- 2—Patient perseverance seems more difficult for me than for most others.

Form groups of two or three with as equal representation as possible from the showing of hands. Have the resulting pairs or triads discuss this question (distribute on handouts you create or write it on the board):

*Does difficulty prod you to try harder, or cause you to give up? Why?*

After three minutes, allow volunteers to share their thoughts with the class as a whole.

Make a transition to Bible study by noting that response to difficulties may define who we are, as it did for those to be studied in today's text.

## Into the Word

Form groups of four or five; give each group one of the following sets of Bible-study questions on handouts (you prepare).

**Worship Group.** Find three commands in [Hebrews 10:23–25](#) to answer these questions: 1—How does each of these relate to the other two? 2—How does this picture of the purpose of worship contrast with how some worshippers today feel about formal worship services? 3—Do you obey all three of these commands as a part of your weekly worship? If not, why not? 4—*To Consider Today:* What should happen for worship to help Christians better obey all three of these commands?

**Gathering Group.** Compare [Hebrews 10:25](#) with [2 Thessalonians 2:1](#), where the same Greek word behind the translations “assembling” and “gathering” occur—the only two places in the New Testament. 1—How are our gatherings today like what we think that gathering will be? 2—How are they different? 3—What do you look forward to experiencing when you gather with other Christians in Heaven? 4—*To Consider Today:* How does that anticipation affect your feeling about gathering for worship here?

**Faithfulness Group.** Compare [Hebrews 10:26–31](#) with [Hebrews 6:4–6](#). 1—What spiritual condition do both of these passages consider? 2—How might each of these be interpreted in

light of the teaching that surrounds them (see [Hebrews 5:11–6:1](#); [10:28](#))? 3—Who stands central in the [Hebrews 10](#) passage? What hope do we have if, after naming Christ as Lord, we reject Him? 4—*To Consider Today*: Why is this so difficult to hear in today’s culture?

**Persecution Group.** List all that the believers earlier suffered, according to [Hebrews 10:32–34](#). 1—Which of these sacrifices seems most severe or difficult to you? 2—How would you expect Christians to continue living after enduring such persecution? 3—What encouragement does the author of the text offer in verses [35–36](#)? 4—*To Consider Today*: Does long-term experience with suffering always lead to stronger faith? Why, or why not?

When you call time, allow groups to report to the whole class. (*Option.* Step outside today’s lesson text by having learners complete the “A Call to Persevere” exercise on the activity page, which you can download.)

## Into Life

Based on those discussions from the fourth questions, have each group outline a devotional talk that challenges them to be examples that encourage fellow believers to be more committed in their service to Christ.

*Option.* Distribute copies of the “Why Worship?” exercise on the activity page. Have participants work in pairs to complete it as indicated. Have colored pencils or markers available for those who request them. Award a token prize for the most catchy creation.