

LESSON 11

AUGUST 15, 2021

UNIT III. FAITH GIVES US HOPE

KEEP GOING

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 40:1-13

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 10:19-39

PRINT PASSAGE: Hebrews 10:23-36

KEY VERSE

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised).
(Hebrews 10:23, KJV)

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Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. (Hebrews 10:23, NIV)

LESSON AIMS

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Explore the stories of early believers who suffered for the sake of their faith.
- Resolve to endure suffering that results from your faithful witness.
- Share in the suffering of Christians around the world.

KEY TERMS

Confession (verse 23, NASB)—Greek: *homologia* (hom-ol-og-ee'-ah): what one professes (confesses); acknowledgment; “profession” (KJV); “profess” (NIV).

Encouraging (verse 25)—Greek: *parakaleó* (par-ak-al-eh'-o): calling to or for; positive persuading; strengthening; “exhorting” (KJV).

Forsaking (verse 25)—Greek: *egkataleipó* (eng-kat-al-i'-po): leaving behind; abandoning; deserting; “giving up” (NIV).

Good (verse 24)—Greek: *kalos* (kal-os'): beautiful, as an outward sign of the inward good; commendable, pleasing, or honorable.

Love (verse 24)—Greek: *agapé* (ag-ah'-pay): affection; goodwill; benevolence; compassion.

Truth (verse 26)—Greek: *alétheia* (al-ay'-thi-a): facts related to God's will; divine revelation.

INTRODUCTION

Oseola McCarty was a woman from Mississippi who worked most of her life as a cleaning woman. Over many decades, she diligently saved a portion of her meager earnings and gained national and international attention when she donated more than \$150,000 to the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Her generous gift funded a scholarship for deserving students who might not otherwise be able to afford a college education. Ms. McCarty had to quit school in the sixth grade to take care of her family. Like her grandmother, she spent her entire career washing and cleaning for others, serving her profession until her arthritis would no longer allow her to continue. She never married and never had children. She was taught by her mother to save at an early age and did so with multiple banks. She lived a meager life, never owning a car nor living an extravagant life. When word began to spread about her lifelong sacrifice and her resolve to leave a legacy for the next generation, others matched her donation—which served in creating an endowment fund that exists to this day for those who are in need. In 1998, she received an honorary degree from USM. She had previously received an honorary doctoral degree from Harvard University and was awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal from President Clinton. In 1996, she pushed the button for the dropping of the New Year's Eve Ball in Times Square. The trip to New York marked the first time she had flown in an airplane or stayed in a hotel. Three years later, in 1999, Ms. Oseola McCarty died at age 91. She had set a goal early in life and by faith in God, she persevered to see it through. When she set up her trust fund, she gave 10 percent to her church, 10 percent to three family members, and 60 percent to USM. What is your legacy?

THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Hebrews 10:22 refers to the high priest's ceremonial cleansing ritual that occurred before his dressing in sacred garments to enter the inner tabernacle (see Leviticus 16:4; Numbers 8:7). The Greek word rendered "meet together" is used here and in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 as a noun and means "a gathering." The verses are written instructions for Christians in every generation who gather together for the purpose of public worship and fellowship. Those who gather faithfully with other Christians enjoy the benefit and blessing of encouragement, motivation, connection, and support from like-minded believers. After a description of the faithful life (see Hebrews 10:19-25), the writer exhorts believers to continue consistently in faith. Warning of the dangers of deliberately choosing wrong over what is right, the writer describes the consequences of such choices—the fearful judgment of God. No matter what challenges life brings, true believers should never be negligent or nonchalant in doing what God requires.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

People: Who? (*Hebrews 10:23-25*)

KJV

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.

NIV

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

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

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.

The writer challenges his fellow believers in Christ to hold tightly to their faith with a sincere and purposeful grip on our faith in Christ Jesus. Specifically, he calls the reader to an unwavering, unshakable hope that is anchored in the sure faithfulness of the Savior (verse 23). As believers remain personally committed and connected to Christ, the writer encourages them to seek ways to prompt other believers to walk in love and to do good deeds for Christ's sake (verse 24), as they remain faithful to the good habit of gathering together for worship and Christian fellowship. The writer's point here is that the Christian life is more than a belief system; it is an active, engaging way of life to be shared by believers living in community and fellowship with others, encouraging one another in love and obedience to God. With this in mind, Christians must not "forsake" (intentionally choose not to participate in) the gathering together with the saints (verse 25), nor be swayed by those who have decided not to attend or participate (verse 25).

What do you think? What are some of the reasons that people give for not attending church services?

Problem: What? (*Hebrews 10:26-31*)

KJV

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.

NIV

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

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

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

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?

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

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

Interestingly, the writer moves from “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” (verse 25) to a discourse about sin and judgment. Is it sinful to justify “Bedside Baptist” Christianity (“devotion” that skips church and celebrates being at home)? Most excuses start with complaints about hypocritical or sinful behavior among other Christians and church members/leaders. While it is true that Christians are not perfect, only forgiven, it is equally true that we must never try to use another person’s spiritual shortcomings as an excuse for doing less than what we know God requires of us. Many Christians are easily fixated or distracted by who falls short, sins, skips Bible Study or worship, or chooses to be unfaithful to the ministry of the church. Instead, the focus of every Christian should remain centered on pleasing God, knowing that He will judge us only according to what we do, without regard to what anyone else does or does not do. One of our most important duties before God is to gather together in love, encouraging each other and growing in the grasp of God’s word. As believers grow deeper in the Word, each of us should bear the fruit of a faithful, obedient spiritual life (verse 26). Those who knowing and trust the Word of God, yet give themselves to the habit of continual, deliberate sin, cancel out the benefit of Christ’s great sacrifice for them (verse 26). With harsh warning, the writer challenges the reader to remain faithful with fearful respect and reverence for God who through Christ will devour His enemies (verse 27). Drawing from the Jewish faith history and Deuteronomy 17:6-7, the text explains the necessity of giving reverence to God—ultimately, we must obey God because, in due time, the Lord will judge His people (verse 28). Under the Law of Moses, those who violated God’s commandments were condemned by the word of two or three witnesses. How much more guilty, the writer argues, are they who disregard Jesus’ sacrifice and stomp or trample on the grace of God offered to every believer under the covenant of grace (verses 29-31)? It is one thing to have human witnesses to testify against those who sin, but who can bear the testimony of God against them? When we sin, we reject the gift of God through Jesus, our Savior. In His holiness, God will repay evil with His righteous judgment. Those who long to escape the wrath of God’s judgment against sin need only to receive the Word of God and continue in love, service, and faithful obedience to God.

What do you think? What can you say to weak, overwhelmed believers who have drifted away from serving God with enthusiasm?

Push: How? (*Hebrews 10:32-36*)

KJV

32 But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions;

33 Partly, whilst ye were made a gazing stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.

34 For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

35 Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.

36 For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

NIV

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

33 Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated.

34 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.

35 So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.

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

In view of all life's problems and pressures, how can we push through and persevere in faith? The writer seems to suggest that those who are faithful in joining other believers for public worship and fellowship find the encouragement, strength, and determination to endure and push through and overcome their difficulties. This is the blessing of being connected to a community of believers—not just holding membership in a local church, but also being actively involved, serving in small-group ministries. God works deeper, hidden benefits in the hearts and souls of those who sacrifice the time and effort to show up and serve in His house. The text calls the reader to reflect on the early days of their own faith journey, and to remember the zeal that strengthened them to endure all amounts of criticism or persecution from family, friends, and others (verse 32). In a time when many believers endured serious persecution for the profession of their faith, the writer recalls some who were publicly insulted and ridiculed or stood by to give moral support to those who suffered in such ways (verse 33). In the days of the early church, it was not uncommon to see believers standing faithfully along with those who were imprisoned or

had their property seized and taken away because of their faith. Persecution against the church has always taken many different forms. The text describes the special beauty of Christians' joining together—embracing, upholding, and sharing the burden of those who suffered for Christ (verse 34). Having acknowledged the difficulties of the challenge, the writer charges believers not to give up or lose heart in the face of their trials, reminding them that their confidence in Christ will surely be rewarded (verse 35). Yes, the Christian life is sometimes weighed down with trouble, but God's people should press on by faith, doing God's will and trusting that they will receive the promise of God (verse 36). "United we stand" is an old cliché but a certain truth. The church has endured through the ages because God has never forsaken His people and, by God's grace, the people of God have stood together and never ultimately abandoned the church.

What do you think? In a difficult world, what is one of the greatest benefits the church offers Christians today?

A CLOSING THOUGHT

The church has always had critics, doubters, skeptics, and enemies. Christians bind together in unity, not because the church is not flawed and imperfect, but because the head of the church, Jesus Christ, is perfect. In His sinless perfection, He has made a place for a sinful, imperfect people to come and be made whole; that place is the church. Because of the grace that forgives us of our sins, we reach out to embrace others, overlook faults, and submit to one another in godly love—worshipping and working together for Christ's sake and the glory of God.

YOUR LIFE

This week, reflect on the times when you have either decided not to attend church, or to not be actively involved in serving and supporting the church. What things block today's Christians from having a strong commitment to the church? Let this week's lesson inspire your recommitment to more faithful attendance and joyful service at church.

YOUR WORLD!

Can you recall the faces and names of persons who used to attend church regularly but have now fallen away? Pray for them; then, as you are led, reach out and gently encourage them, ask if they have any prayer requests or special concerns, then invite them to return to worship or a special event at church. Do not be condemning or judgmental; just let them know that the church doors are open and you along with many others would be genuinely glad to see them again.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, help us to understand the power of gathering together in Your presence with Your people to worship You. Help us stand with our suffering, hurting brothers and sisters as we keep our focus on You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

CONCLUSION (Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

While reading the background Scripture, consider this thought: "How would you describe a perfect love?"

HOME DAILY BIBLE READING

A CONQUERING FAITH

(August 16-22, 2021)

MONDAY, August 16: “Testing Our Love for God” (Deuteronomy 13:1-4)

TUESDAY, August 17: “Love God by Keeping His Commandments” (John 14:15-24)

WEDNESDAY, August 18: “Discerning the Spirit of Truth and Error” (1 John 4:1, 4-6)

THURSDAY, August 19: “Knowing God, We Can Love Others” (1 John 4:7-12)

FRIDAY, August 20: “Faith Is the Victory” (1 John 5:1-3)

SATURDAY, August 21: “Believers in Jesus Have Life” (1 John 5:6-12)

SUNDAY, August 22: “Faith That Loves Overcomes Obstacles”
(1 John 4:2-3, 13-17; 5:4-5)