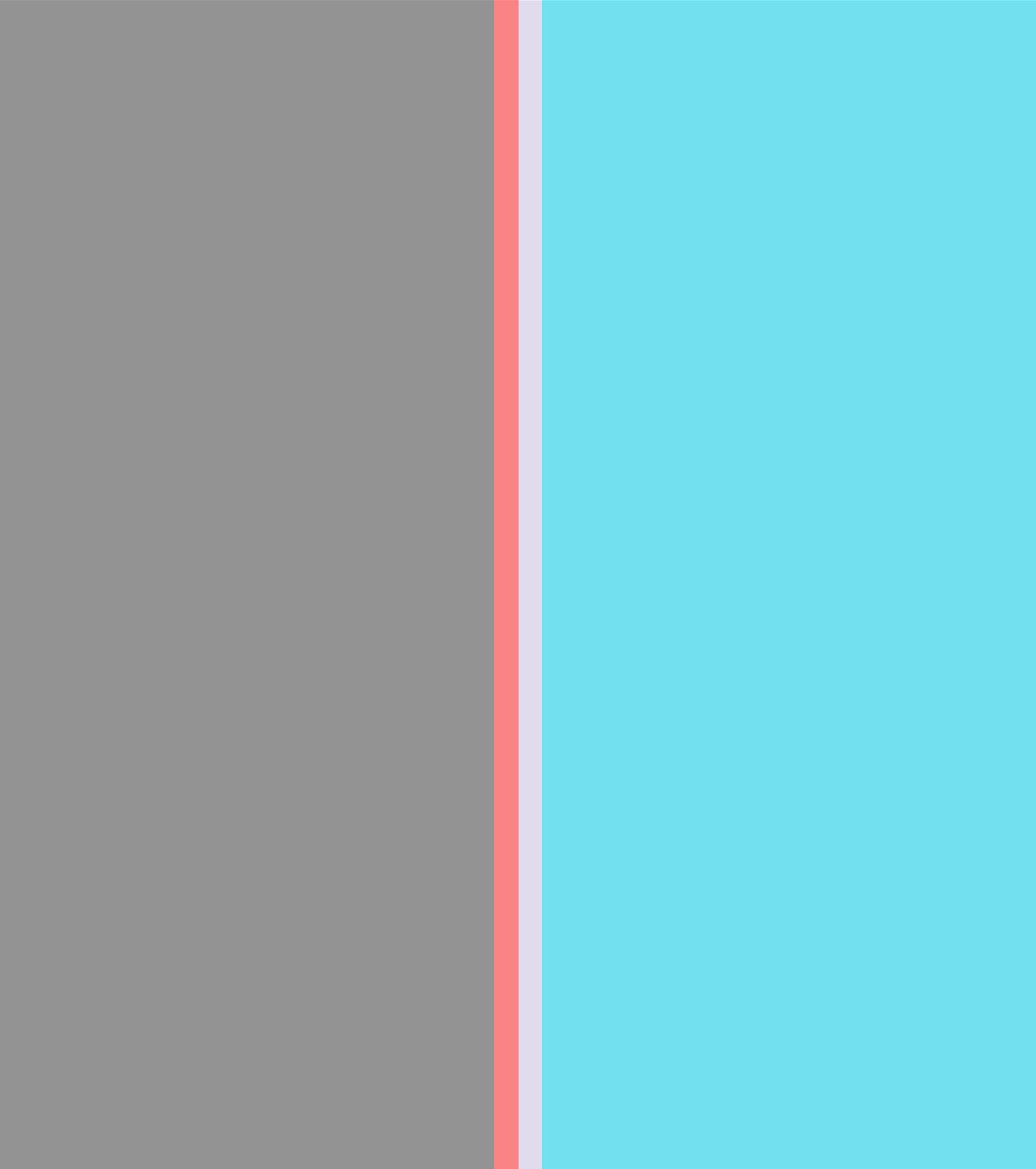


Discipleship Guide



WHAT'S HAPPENING THIS FALL?

Hey church! Here is a quick overview of some important and upcoming events this semester. Stay tuned in for more details:

Sept 23- City-Wide Prayer Event 6:30 PM- 7:30 PM

Sept 26- Volunteer Church Clean Up Day

Oct 4- Baptisms & Church Wide Parking Lot Service

Oct 25- Reformation Sunday

Nov 1- Daylight Savings Time Ends

HEBREWS INTERPRETATION HELP

Hebrews shows us how serious theology is sincerely practical. As the early church began facing suffering, and with it, the temptation to flee from Jesus, Hebrews was given as a direct and passionate exhortation, helping readers cling to Christ by showing who He is from a range of perspectives: for those wanting to know their sin is forgiven, Jesus is the perfect and permanent sacrifice; for those seeking protection and spiritual service, Jesus does both better than the angels; for those desiring to hear from God, Jesus is the best word God has ever given. The author goes back to numerous Old Testament names, events, and experiences as he contrasts the stunning reality of Jesus with the shadows that came before Him.

Because of this, we are providing Community Group leaders with some basic skills for handling both Hebrews and the Old Testament passages referenced within it.¹

THREE INTERPRETATION STEPS

1. Observe the Text

Ask:

- What are repeated words or ideas?
- Who is writing? Who is talking?
- Where is this passage taking place?
- Are there contrasts? Comparisons? Lists?
- What figures of speech are present?
- What verbs are used? Are the actions past, present, or future?
- Are there quotes from other parts of the Bible? Where are these quotes from?
- Are there words that indicate a mood, tone, or emotion?
- Are there any linking words such as “but”, “therefore”, “because”, etc.?
- What are the roles and actions of God in this passage?
- What are the roles and actions of people in this passage?

2. Investigate the Original Audience & Interpret the Passage

As a family of churches, we are approaching Hebrews with the following assumptions:

What Hebrews Is

The book of Hebrews is neither a book nor a letter but a sermon most likely preached and written before the destruction of the Jewish Temple (which happened in 70AD). The traditional title “To the Hebrews” reflects the early church’s belief that this sermon was given to Jewish Christians.

¹ Portions of this section are adapted from Matt Smethurst’s article, “How to Study Your Bible in 2020”, www.thegospelcoalition.org

Why Hebrews was Written

This sermon was preached and written to the Jewish Christians in Italy with explicit evangelistic goals (the author wants to see more people trust Jesus, especially the Jewish people who had yet to see Jesus as the fulfillment of their history) and with the intention of helping new Christians stay committed to Jesus. Remember these reasons as we explore Hebrews throughout 2020.

Who Wrote Hebrews

Although we cannot determine with full confidence who preached/wrote this letter, we can eliminate some candidates like the Apostle Paul, who represents the most popular choice throughout church history. With a closer look at the grammar and use of the Greek language, we can see this person did not speak, write, argue theologically, or communicate like the Apostle Paul.

The author was probably well known to the community he is addressing, and he was probably a second-generation Christian. The use of the Greek language tells us that the preacher/author was well educated. Lastly, the preacher was an expert in the Old Testament; no other NT book sources the Old Testament like the book of Hebrews.

What Hebrews is About

Jesus is the supreme message of God and the fulfillment of all the Old Testament types; Jesus takes the people of God out of the shadows of the Old Testament types, and fulfills the promises of God. We respond by seeing Jesus as more excellent than all the shadows that have come before, and as the central focus of our faith, leading to our endurance (the words “better,” “more,” and “greater” appear a combined 25 times in Hebrews).

How Hebrews Applies to Us

The historical, resurrected Jesus is significant, present, powerful, dynamic, and relevant to all of life, as opposed to modern ideas of Jesus, which present a small, nondescript, powerless, and static being.

Jesus is better than any spiritual experience, teacher, leader, political strategy, social movement, accomplishment, gift, adventure, or religious and philosophical activity. He is worth following, even at the cost of your acceptance, social inclusion, or life.

With this background information, you’re better prepare to ask:

- Does the surrounding context clarify any confusing words or phrases?
- It’s best to examine the “nearest” context—other verses in the same chapter or other chapters in the same book—before consulting “farther” passages or outside resources.
- How would I paraphrase this passage in my own words?
- Why did the biblical author write this particular passage?
- Why did he feel it necessary to include?
- Is my interpretation consistent with what I noticed in the observation stage, or have I made leaps based on prior assumptions?
- Do other passages of Scripture fill out my interpretation?
- Let clearer Bible passages help you understand less clear Bible passages
- Where does this passage fall in redemptive history?
- How does it fit within the Bible’s story as a whole?

For more help with investigating the context and interpretation, you can access resources such as [this free course from The Gospel Coalition](#).

It's also helpful to remember what the Bible is: *the Bible is God's communication to human beings about Jesus Christ*. Therefore, here is a simple way to think about the big story of the Bible and how it relates to Jesus:²

Old Testament (Genesis - Malachi): **Anticipation**

Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John): **Manifestation**

Acts: Proclamation

Epistles (Romans - Jude): **Explanation**

Revelation: Consummation

3. Application

Ask:

- What's something I learned about God?
- His character, His plan, His priorities, His promises, His desires, His ways?
- What's something I learned about myself? My neighbor? The world?
- What's the sinful condition on display in this passage?
- What aspect of human sin or brokenness is most evident?
- What aspect of God's grace is most evident?
- How does the gospel - the stunning news of what God accomplished in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to reconcile rebels to Himself - affect my understanding of this passage?
- How do I need to change my thinking or living based on what I've learned?
- How should I be praying in light of this passage?
- Is there an encouragement or promise here that I need to meditate on?
- What implications does this passage have for the way I engage my unbelieving friends?
- How does this passage apply to my brothers and sisters in Christ? How does it speak to our life together as a church?

² Adapted from "Every Book of the Bible in One Word" by Garrett Kell.

OUT OF THE SHADOWS: COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER GUIDE

WEEK 1

FAITH THAT SAVES

HEBREWS 11:1-7

A NOTE TO LEADERS:

Some weeks in the Discipleship Guide for this series contain multiple Text and Application questions. Please do not feel pressured to rigidly follow this outline or answer every single question. Ask the Spirit to lead you as you lead your group, and be attentive to the needs of your Community Group.

Here are 6 questions you can ask of any passage in Hebrews:

- What is the context of the original audience?
- Why did it matter to the original audience?
- How can we relate to the original audience? How might the text matter to us?
- What is the text calling us to be, do, or know?
- What does this passage say about God?
- Where is the gospel, Jesus, or grace found in this text?

PASSAGE SUMMARY

As time passes words take on new and different meanings. In this week's text, we are introduced to both a definition and numerous Old Testament examples of Biblical faith. As one commentator writes, "'Faith' has a dual perspective that could be simply summed up as looking forward (to the fulfillment of God's promises) and looking up (to the unseen reality of God's presence)." The author will use his profoundly simple definition of faith in this passage as the anchor for the numerous individuals and events presented throughout Hebrews 11.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Take a few moments to write down a definition for the word "faith." Keep your definition handy and make adjustments to it as you study this week's verses together.

TEXT

1. At first glance, how does Hebrews 11:1-7 connect with the previous portions of Hebrews?
2. Take some time to get context for each person and situation presented in these verses by reading the following passages:
 1. Abel & Cain - Gen. 4:4, 7
 2. Enoch - Gen. 5:21-24
 3. Noah - Gen. 6:9, 22; 7:1
3. What is the significance of the words that the author uses to describe faith in verse 1? How do these words help us understand what the author of Hebrews means by the word "faith"? What other passages in Scripture help clarify the meaning of the word "faith"?

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

4. What are some cultural definitions of “faith”? How are those definitions similar/different from the definition of ‘faith’ given in verses 1-7?
5. In verse 6 the author says “without faith it is impossible to please him [God].” How would taking this statement to heart vastly change how you live your life?

APPLICATION

1. If you are a Christian, how has your faith in Jesus given you assurance and confidence? If you are not a Christian, what is your understanding of Jesus, and why do you think Christians trust Him?
2. Why can we be certain that the claims and promises of Jesus are true?
3. How do you, personally, arrive at faith in something that you cannot see for yourself, and that offers a promise of good to come later on? Examples: Faith in an upcoming marriage, faith in a new job, faith in wearing masks. Do you apply these same tests to believing in God? Why or why not?

PRAYER

Praise God for revealing Himself and His creative power in the world.

Thank God for the invitation to draw near to and seek Him.

Confess any faithlessness in your heart.

Ask God to give you profound assurance and conviction in relation to His promises.

Pray for the gifts of faith and righteousness to be given to specific people in your life.

WEEK 2

FAITH IN A FOREIGN LAND

HEBREWS 11:8-16

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- What does this passage say about God?
- Where is the gospel, Jesus, or grace found in this text?

PASSAGE SUMMARY

There is never a conflict between biblical faith and facts, but there may be times in our lives when faith demands our hope in God's promises, shown in actions that are at odds with our circumstances, feelings, or the best advice of those around us. In this passage, the author explains what it meant for saints of the Old Covenant to live by faith in a place not their own. By examining their actions, and the faith that motivated those actions, the author helps his audience, and modern saints today - who are sojourners as well - walk through the foreign land of life with a confident hope in the God who has promised that His Son will one day return with a new home in tow.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Take a moment to share where you currently feel God is calling you to trust him and have more faith.

TEXT

1. In your own words describe what is meant by the phrase "By faith". For example, what does the author mean when he writes, "*By faith* Abraham obeyed..."?
2. What is the significance of Abraham and Sarah? Why are these two figures mentioned and examined in this passage? What promises were made to them?
3. Why does the author describe the hope of these Old Testament saints with words like "the city that has foundations" (verse 10), "a better country" (verse 16), and "a city" (verse 16)? How does this hope relate to the hope given to Christians?

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

4. Whose story of faith stands out to you more, Abraham's or Sarah's? Why?

APPLICATION

1. What are some things that you have recently been led to do because of your faith in Jesus? Is God leading you to anything like that now? How can we help one another pursue acts of faith in our everyday lives?
2. When is the last time you felt like an exile because you're a Christian? What was your emotional response to this feeling?
3. The author makes the point that a key motivation for Old Testament saints was their desire for a "better country". In your own life, what do you find yourself wanting most? How can the core of these desires be satisfied in Jesus?
4. Verse 16 states that God is "not ashamed" to be called the God of these Old Testament saints. When in your life have you struggled to believe that God is not ashamed to be your God? What causes this doubt?
5. What are some prominent desires in our culture right now? How can we use these desires as a bridge to the gospel during conversations?

PRAYER

Read Colossians 3:12, then pray the following:

Thank God for making sinners His beloved ones.

Thank God for loving you.

Confess doubts you have about God's love, the sufficiency of Jesus, or any desires that you have prioritized more than God.

Ask God to satisfy you and provide fulfillment where you feel discontent.

WEEK 3

FAITH IN THE DESERT

HEBREWS 11:17-31

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- What is the text calling us to be, do, or know?
- What does this passage say about God?
- Where is the gospel, Jesus, or grace found in this text?

PASSAGE SUMMARY

Putting God first in a world that is against Him has been a struggle for centuries. But God remains committed to His people and His glory. Though He remains beyond our sight, God is at work to motivate the obedience of His people even in the midst of His enemies. Throughout this passage the author reminds his readers of the trials and faith of saints who came before, pointing to the power and presence of God that came with each difficulty. Even when opposition is paralyzing, God's promises can galvanize His people. So why continue on? Why trust even in the middle of life's deserts? We have a greater wealth than this world could ever offer.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Read what Jesus told His disciples in Matt. 10:27-30 and then ask the Spirit to use His Word and His people to shape your group into a community of people who will follow Jesus no matter what.

"Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."

TEXT

1. Take a moment to remember the context of Hebrews. Who was this sermon written to? What was the original audience most likely going through? Why does this information matter for us today?

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

2. The Christian church's understanding of faith includes three different elements:
 1. **The facts you have to know** (for example, Jesus actually existed)
 2. **Comprehension/understanding of the facts** (for example, Jesus claimed to be the only way to be saved from God's judgment)
 3. **Trust in the facts** (for example, personally trusting that Jesus is the only way to be saved from God's judgment)

With this in mind, what facts about God can we know from this passage? How do these facts show God's worth and value?

3. According to this passage, what motivated the difficult actions of these Old Testament saints? How did their theology motivate obedience, risk, sacrifice, and worship?

4. How is God's faithfulness and grace shown or described in these verses? What examples of faith are you drawn to in these verses? Why?

APPLICATION

1. This passage shows intergenerational acts of faith. How can we as individuals and as a group evangelize and disciple younger generations? How can we practically honor the more mature believers in our lives who have helped us trust Jesus?
2. In what ways are you currently being tempted with the "fleeting pleasures of sin" or with fear/anxiety? How does this passage instruct us to deal with these temptations?
3. In 2020, where have you seen persons in power or worldly systems attempting to draw the allegiance of God's people? What does trust in God look like in the midst of these attempts? According to Hebrews, how should Christians respond?
4. Standing firm and enduring by faith are prevalent themes throughout Hebrews. What gets in the way of your own endurance? What are some practices and disciplines you can begin (or have begun) to strengthen your confidence in God?

PRAYER

Pray for the global Christian church, including the church in America, to swear allegiance only to Jesus, and to remain faithful to His goals and His ways even in the face of threats, punishment, suffering, and sin.

WEEK 4

FAITH OF THE GREAT

HEBREWS 11:32-40

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- What does this passage say about God?
- Where is the gospel, Jesus, or grace found in this text?

PASSAGE SUMMARY

Contrary to the false prosperity “gospel” which promises a life of health, wealth, and ease for faithful Christians, this section of Hebrews shows that God is so glorious and so good that those who know Him will follow Him no matter what kind of life they’re called live in this world. Though their acts of faith were great, the saints of the Old Testament only caught a dim hint of the glorious promises of God. If they exercised faith in the time before Christ, how much more can we who have His ever-present help! Expecting both miracles and suffering can bring balance to our perspective as Christians.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Watch this video from **Voice of the Martyrs** together as you prepare to study this week’s verses. Then pray for Christians all over the world who are suffering because of their faith in Christ.

Video Link: <https://youtu.be/ybJswTV82Ac>

TEXT

1. How do the names listed in verse 32 connect to the actions listed in verses 33-38?
2. Sometimes acting in faith brings about miraculous and righteous events (verses 33-34) and sometimes acting in faith brings about suffering, violence, and death (verses 35-38). Why the difference? Why do some acts of faith bring beauty while other acts of faith bring pain? How can this fact bring balance to our own expectations about following Jesus?
3. The author of Hebrews has elsewhere used the word “perfect”. What does this word mean throughout Hebrews and what does it mean in verse 40?
4. Sometimes obedience to God can make us feel like exiles or weirdos. Verse 38 presents an upside-down perspective on the world’s opinion of Christians - what does the author mean when he writes that these suffering saints were those “of whom the world was not worthy”?

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

APPLICATION

1. When in your own life have you truly felt like an exile because of your faith? How did this experience shape your relationship with Jesus?
2. This passage highlights two ditches that we may fall into as Christians. One ditch is viewing success as flowing from ourselves, and the other is viewing suffering or "lack of success" as God's disfavor. Which do you lean to more? Why? How does this passage correct us?
3. If you are a Christian, you are "in Christ", which means that the saints listed in Hebrews 11 are your forefathers and your family. How can knowing this reality change the way you read Scripture?
4. Brainstorm ways to evangelize during COVID-19 and then pray for God's blessing upon your plans.

PRAYER

Pray for an increase in your trust for Jesus, and ask God to give you at least one opportunity to tell someone about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

WEEK 5

ENDURE AS A RUNNER

HEBREWS 11:40-12:2

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- What does this passage say about God?
- Where is the gospel, Jesus, or grace found in this text?

PASSAGE SUMMARY

With a wealth of faith-filled history in tow, the author now transitions to an exhortation to remain in the race of following Jesus by setting our minds, hearts, and eyes upon Him. As we look behind us and see the endurance of both sinners and our sinless Lord, we can follow suit and throw away anything that might hinder us. The author doesn't want us to simply read the Old Testament and move on with our day, he wants us to join in the race that they started, the same race that Christ Himself has run ahead of us.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Pray this prayer together:

Let Your ways be known upon earth, Your saving health among all nations.

Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You.

We glory in Your cross, O Lord, and praise and glorify Your holy resurrection;

for by virtue of Your cross joy has come to the whole world. Amen.

TEXT

1. What metaphors do you see in these verses? What is the author communicating through these metaphors?
2. Define the "joy" that was set before Jesus as He endured the cross.
3. How is Jesus described in this passage and what does this tell us about His identity and His actions?
4. In what ways can someone "look to Jesus"? Based on your own understanding, how have Christians throughout church history practiced "looking to Jesus"?

APPLICATION

1. How has your own sin burdened you and slowed you down in your own race of faith?

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

2. How do Christian community and corporate worship gatherings contribute to a Christian's ability to "run with endurance"? How have these two rhythms helped you personally run with endurance?
3. What does it look like for us as a community to lay aside every weight and sin? Do we have a Community Group that is safe enough to confess sin? Why or why not?
4. What are some essential elements of "running the Christian race"? What rhythms should we be regularly participating in? Where do we see these in Scripture?

PRAYER

Use this prayer from Valley of Vision as a guide for your own prayers:

*O God, Thy main plan, and the end of thy will
is to make Christ glorious and beloved
in heaven
where he is now ascended,
where one day all the elect will behold his glory
and love and glorify him for ever.
Though here I love him but little,
may this be my portion at last.
In this world thou hast given me a beginning,
one day it will be perfected in the realm above.
Thou hast helped me to see and know Christ,
though obscurely,
to take him, receive him,
to possess him, love him,
to bless him in my heart, mouth, life.
Let me study and stand for discipline,
and all the ways of worship,
out of love for Christ;
and to show my thankfulness;
to seek and know his will from love,
to hold it in love,
and daily to care for and keep this state of heart.*