

An abstract, expressive painting of Jesus Christ. His face is the central focus, rendered with warm, textured brushstrokes in shades of orange, yellow, and brown. He has a beard and long, dark hair. On his head is a crown made of a chaotic, colorful tangle of sticks and branches, with some strands of red, blue, and pink. The background is a vibrant, abstract composition of various colors (blue, green, pink, orange, purple) applied in thick, expressive brushstrokes and splatters, creating a sense of movement and energy.

POWER SERIES #13

# JESUS

AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF OUR FAITH

A 40-Day Walk With Jesus Through The Book of Hebrews



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**A 40-Day Walk With Jesus Through The Book of Hebrews**



ICOC Nigeria Publishing

## **JESUS: AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF OUR FAITH**

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### A Happy and Prosperous New Year to the Saints of God!

*We*elcome to our Power Series Devotional 13.0!

What a privilege from God that we can begin the year together, digging deep and learning from the scriptures.

I am particularly excited that we are studying a Bible book, and the Letter to the Hebrews is filled with treasures, old and new, that will enrich your walk with God like never before. Set your heart on seeking God every day of these 40 days and beyond. Have a regular time to read the scriptures for yourself each day, and then, read through the devotionals. Let us share in our small groups, ask questions and – as I am sure you will have – include your insights in the ongoing discussion. We did this as contributing writers this year and it was amazing to learn from one another!

Putting this edition together was no walk in the park and many people, home and abroad, have contributed to making the bible project a reality.

A special thanks to the Lagos staff members and the National Leadership Group for brainstorming on the suggested bible book to study. I want to particularly thank the Project Directors, Chris and Rolayo Ogbonnaya, for their hands-on support at every stage of the work, and our kingdom teachers in the persons of Fred George, Emmanuel Emeh and Gilbert Kimeng, for providing resources for in-depth study and structural advice on the book of Hebrews. I am deeply grateful to our 23 contributing writers for this year who stepped up, some for the first time; volunteering their time and effort to study, write and sometimes re-write the devotionals in this book. This work could not have been done without the excellent editing of Wale Aderibigbe and Rolayo Ogbonnaya. I profusely thank our production crew headed by Emmanuel Emeh, for working despite tight deadlines to produce such a world-class document.

Finally, I thank every disciple of Jesus who faithfully reads these devotionals and makes the entire effort worthwhile.

And to God be the glory!

**Titi George**

Editor-In-Chief

**Dear Beloved Brothers and Sisters,**

Grace and peace be unto you as we embark on a transformative journey through the sacred pages of the Book of Hebrews in this year's Power Series devotional titled, "JESUS AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF OUR FAITH."

As we reflect on the profound and timeless truths found in the book of Hebrews, let our hearts be filled with anticipation for the spiritual growth and revelation that awaits us in the next 40 days. The theme, "JESUS: AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF OUR FAITH," echoes the resounding promise that our faith is not just initiated by Jesus but also brought to its completion in Him.

This devotional, meticulously crafted to include six books, 13 chapters, and 43 daily readings, each dedicated to unravelling different facets of our Lord and Saviour, will be our guide. Join thousands of disciples across West Africa and the world as we explore the depths of His identity, the beauty of His priesthood, the richness of the covenant He mediates, and the unmatched legacy He pioneers and perfects.

### **Book #1: Jesus: Son and Brother**

In these devotions, we will walk alongside the Son of God, understanding the profound significance of Jesus as both divine Son and compassionate Brother, a unique union that bridges the gap between heaven and earth.

### **Book #2: Jesus: Humble and Merciful High Priest**

Discover the humility and mercy of our High Priest, Jesus Christ, who understands our weaknesses and extends grace when we need it most. This section will usher us into the holy presence of the One who intercedes on our behalf.

### **Book #3: Jesus: Mediator of a New and Better Covenant**

We shall be exploring the New Covenant ushered in by Jesus, a covenant that surpasses the old and brings us into a relationship of grace and transformation.

### **Book #4: Jesus: Pioneer and Perfecter of Our Faith**

As we delve into this chapter, let us be inspired by Jesus, the Pioneer who blazes the trail of faith, and the Perfecter who brings our faith to its fullness and maturity.

### **Book #5: Jesus: Lord of the Unshakable Kingdom**

Explore the unshakable kingdom over which Jesus reigns. Let this truth anchor your soul as we navigate the challenges of life in a world that often feels shaky and uncertain.

### **Book #6: Jesus: The Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever**

In these final chapters, we are reminded of the unchanging nature of our Lord. In a world of flux and change, Jesus remains a steadfast foundation on which we can build our lives.

Each day's reading contains a treasure trove of inspirational messages, concluding reflections, a call to action, and suggestions for further reading. Let us, with open hearts, embark on this 40-day walk with Jesus, allowing His Word to permeate our lives and draw us closer to Him.

May this devotional be a source of encouragement, enlightenment, and empowerment as we fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.

In Christ's love,

**Emmanuel Emeh**

Evangelist and Bible Teacher

# POWER SERIES 2024

THEME: JESUS: AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF OUR FAITH

(Inspired by the Book of Hebrews)

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### JESUS: SON AND BROTHER

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2. [Jesus, God's Radiance & Representation](#) 1:1-4
3. [Superior to Angels](#) 1:4-14
4. [Pay Careful Attention](#) 2:1
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# JESUS: Son & Brother

Chapter 1 - 4



[Hebrews Chapter 1](#)

[Hebrews Chapter 2](#)

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## Heb 2:10-12

*10 In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. 11 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. 12 He says,*

*"I will declare your name to my brothers;  
in the presence of the congregation, I will sing  
your praises."  
NIV*

### **JESUS: SON AND BROTHER (HEBREWS 1-4)**

**Day 1** – God Speaks

**Day 2** – Jesus, God's Radiance & Representation

**Day 3** – Superior to Angels.

**Day 4** – Pay Careful Attention.

**Day 5** – This Great Salvation

**Day 6** – Big Brother Jesus.

**Day 7** – Do not harden your Heart.

**Day 8** – Power of Encouragement.

**Day 9** – Rest or Rebellion

### Hebrews 1:1–2

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*...In these last days, He has spoken to us through His Son...*

**I** love the book of Hebrews with great passion. One important theme of this book is its laser focus on revealing the nature, power, and work of Jesus and his superiority over anything or anyone the first Jewish disciples had ever known or heard of. As we believers read it today, it has the same purpose for us.

Hebrews begins by telling us how God speaks to us. God's words are powerful and many-sided. His first recorded words in the book of Genesis were for creation to burst forth from nothing. In creation, God spoke ten times, and powerful things happened. The vast cosmos was created, followed by the lushly populated green earth. God himself named the sky, the day, the night, the seas, and the land. When God speaks, there is grace and blessing.

God spoke to the first humans, giving them words of blessing that continue today: the gift of fruitfulness, multiplication, abundance, dominion, etc. He made Adam speak and name all the creatures. He spoke to Adam, giving instructions about food in his garden of Eden. He spoke to the serpent, to the woman, and the man, pronouncing the consequences for their disobedience. God does speak words of blessing, directing us on how to live, and he speaks words of warning, like the good parent that he is.

Two seeds, or lineages, have emerged as a result of God speaking. The seed of those who hear God's word and call on his name (Seth's lineage, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, the prophets, among others) and those who hear God's words but ignore them, scoff them, and go on to build their own empires, civilizations, and "Edens."

(Cain's lineage, Lamech, Pharaoh of Egypt, Sodom and Gomorrah, Canaanite communities, Israel's hypocritical religious leaders.)

It was God who spoke through the prophets. They consistently pointed people toward how they should live in order to continue to inherit his blessings. The prophets' words had the character of "not finished," as they anticipated and looked forward to their fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ, God's anointed king. Just over 2020 years ago, God finally spoke through his Son, Jesus the Messiah. Jesus came in the flesh. (Hebrews 10:5) He tabernacled with humans and made his dwelling among us. (John 1:14) He came to speak the very words of God about His kingdom and its entry requirements (Matthew 5-7).

Jesus' words were those of YHWH himself.

As before, the Messiah's words split hearers into two clear camps: those who embrace his teaching and enter his kingdom, and those who hear but scoff and mock at it, ignore it, or fight against it as they build their personal world empires.

The Son is God's ultimate revelation, the fulfillment of the prophetic word. Jesus is greater than the prophets, and infinitely so. He did not just bring the message; he is the message.

## **Conclusion**

God speaks divine words, calling his redeemed to continue to listen and reciprocate his blessing and gift of grace. Jesus is God's word to us. As God speaks, we must listen, hear, and obey. How are you responding to the words of the Messiah?

## **Call to Action:**

1. Describe your relationship with the Messiah's words and calls for life and doctrine.
2. Describe your relationship with other things you pursue. Compare 1 and 2. Where do you need to make changes by putting Jesus first?
3. Commit to a deep, consistent study of God's word this year.

**Further Reading:** John 8:1–12. Revelation 1:1–3

## JESUS, GOD'S RADIANCE, AND REPRESENTATION

**Scripture Reading:** Hebrews 1:1-4

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*The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being...*

Have you ever tried gazing directly at the sun? It is not a good idea because its rays can be blinding, even though it is 150 million kilometres away. What a powerful star that is! And science tells us it is not the biggest or brightest one in the universe! If the things created are this powerful, how much more awesome is the One who created them? (Gen 1:14-18)

We serve a mighty and glorious God. The men and prophets of old were privileged to see only a part of this glory. Yet, even what they saw was so great and mind-blowing; that they could hardly handle it. God let Moses see only the "back" of His glory as His radiance and splendour passed by. (Ex 33:12-23)

Isaiah cried, "Woe to me!" as he was overwhelmed by the glory of God's presence he saw in the temple. (Isaiah 6:5)

Ezekiel was like a dead man with his face to the ground when he saw the likeness of God's glory (Ezekiel 1:28).

Yet, the desire of God had always been that His children would know Him fully and completely. He has done so by sending us Jesus. Yesterday, we learned that Jesus is God's message. Today, we learn that Jesus is God's image. When we see Jesus, we see God. Consider these scriptures:

### Heb 1:3

*The Son [Jesus Christ] is the "exact imprint of God's very being" (Greek translation).*

### **Col 3:15,19**

*The Son is the image of the invisible God... For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him.*

### **Col 2:9**

*In Christ, all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have received fullness in Christ.*

*Brothers and Sisters, how privileged we are! Our forefathers only knew some aspects of Yahweh's glory and person. But today, we have the complete picture in Christ Jesus! We can know the full extent of God's greatness, His power, His love, His justice, His mercy, His wisdom, and all of His character through our relationship with Jesus Christ.*

The intent of the writer of Hebrews throughout the book we are reading was to urge the believers to grasp the surpassing greatness of what they now had in Christ Jesus, despite the challenges they were presently facing.

It is the same for us. Should we take this grace for granted? The truth is that, as human beings, we only hold on to what we deeply value. Think about it, how much do you and I cherish the honour of having been invited into a relationship with the King and Controller of the universe, the Sustainer of all life, the Prince of Majesty? How should this conviction influence the way we live?

### **Conclusion**

As we step into a new year, let us recommit ourselves to our priceless relationship with Christ.

### **Call To Action**

Spend time today in personal worship. Stay in God's presence. Thank Him for the privilege of your relationship with Him. Let the radiance of Jesus touch you and transform you.

**Further Reading:** John 1:1-4



## SUPERIOR TO ANGELS

**Scripture Reading:** Hebrews 1:4-14

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*...He became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs...*

The Jewish disciples were under pressure from suffering and society, to dilute or even abandon their commitment to Jesus the Messiah. Their Hebrew text (our Old Testament today) had much to say about prophets, priests, angels, etc. The struggles these Christians experienced included a desire to revert to Judaism since “this following Jesus thing” or walking the narrow road of discipleship to Christ brought nothing but trouble, persecution, and societal hatred (Hebrews 10:32-39).

Imagine how intense it was for them. They faced prison terms, confiscation of their property, etc. A reversion to Judaism seemed attractive, as they would “fit in” once again and avoid being persecuted.

What have you faced and endured as a result of living for Christ as his disciple? A brother recently shared that he has lost several juicy business opportunities simply because he has refused to compromise his faith by engaging in shady deals. Sometimes, when the going gets tough, we can be tempted to look for easier, more popular versions of faith that will expose us to less inconvenience or opposition. It was the same for the Jewish Christians.

At that time, there were strongly held beliefs about the role of angels. Angels are messengers of God and are esteemed as the only beings holy enough to speak directly to God and be in his presence. To see an angel or receive a message from one was no doubt a big deal.

There are several Old Testament accounts of angels sent by God to rescue, deliver, or provide for his people. (Lot, Gen. 19:15, Samson, Judges 13:3)

Thus, the Hebrew writer also used a series of Old Testament quotes to highlight the difference between Jesus' relationship with God and that of the angels. Consider some of them:

And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." Deut. 32:43 LXX and DSS<sup>2</sup>

To which of the angels did God ever say, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? Psalm 110:1

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? Hebrews 1:14

This makes a clear and compelling case for the people of God then and now to hold fast to our confession of Christ because he who offers life is faithful and incomparably superior not only to angels but to every created being, no matter how powerful.

## **Conclusions**

1. Jesus' saving work demonstrates that his coming to save humankind was not an afterthought. It had been God's central plan from the beginning to send his Son, and his angels were merely messengers preparing the way for the Son to come. He is the fulfilment of the Law, and his ministry marks the ultimate victory of God.

2. No human can be right with God and not right with Jesus. This cannot be said about any of God's angels.

3. Angels have a position of honour as messengers of the message concerning Jesus.

4. Angels are ministering spirits, but Jesus and his saved people are the ones ministered to. Why would we worship a fellow worshipper? We should worship Jesus, the one who sits at God's right hand. Jesus is vastly superior to the angels.

## **Call to Action:**

Trust in the power of Jesus, the Messiah, to sustain you through rough times.

**Further Reading:** John 14:15; Rev 2:2–5; Rev. 2:9–10; Rev. 2:13;

## PAY CAREFUL ATTENTION

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Hebrews 2:1

*...We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard...*

Careful attention is required!

Have you ever been in a class where the lecturer gave you areas of concentration to cover before an exam? What was the purpose? Without a doubt, the teacher expects his students to take positive action by paying attention to the information given to ensure a positive result.

Today we see the author of Hebrews calling his readers and, by extension, every disciple of Jesus to pay careful attention to the truth that we have heard so that we will not drift from our faith. Those of us who drive know the importance of being careful as you move in a crowded neighbourhood or approach a junction or highway to avoid an accident. This is extremely important because, when you are careful, you work hard not to let anything go wrong. Attention involves focusing our minds, understandings, and senses on the truth.

### JAMES 1:22-25

The mirror must give you perspective! Paying careful attention starts with our attitude towards God's word.

It is important to listen to God's word, but much more important to obey it.

I must measure the effectiveness of my Bible study time by the effect it has on my behaviour and attitude.

Do you put into practice what you study? Do you allow the Word to change you after studying it?

In the second part of Heb 2:2, God gave us the warning not to drift so that we do not lose our salvation.

When you put a leaf or piece of paper in running water in a stream, it can begin to move away slowly without you noticing. To drift is a gradual process of moving away from the truth. This may happen over some time until you suddenly realise it or it becomes too late.

What are some things that cause us to drift?

1. An out-of-control schedule (Eph 5:15–16)

One of Satan's greatest weapons against our generation is making good people busier than ever before. We so often sacrifice the best things in life by spending time doing things that are just "pretty good." If you desire to walk closely with God, you will necessarily have to begin by taking a close look at your schedule.

2. Misplaced Affections (1 John 2:15)

Do not love the world!

Be careful not to set your heart on things that don't matter. I cannot tell you how many times I have seen good people lured away from church life because they have fallen in love with activities that have no eternal merit.

3. Discouragement (Matt.14:28–29)

When trials of life cause us to become discouraged, we often begin focusing on those problems and take our eyes off Jesus. When Peter walked on water, he did great until he took his eyes off Jesus and began to look at the wind.

When life's clouds grow dark and your trials become fierce, that is the time to run to Jesus, not FROM Jesus.

4. Abundance (1 Tim 6:10)

The love of money, if not controlled, can cause us to drift.

This is a recurring theme throughout the Bible, particularly with the Israelites. People struggle, God blesses them, they become prosperous, and then they depart from God.

Irony, isn't it?

## 5. Sin (Heb 12:1)

Some of us begin to drift away from God because we have sins in our lives that cause us to feel guilty when we show up at church. We are equally reluctant to pray, read the Bible, or even share with others who can help us.

The solution here is not to drift or run from God. The key is to confess your sin, pray, and get restored to your walk with God. (Remember, James 5:16 and 1 John 1:9 are there for a reason.)

## Conclusion

No matter how young or old we are in the faith, we cannot afford to be careless in our walk with God. By taking these areas of our spiritual life seriously, we will avoid drifting away from the truth.

## Call to Action

Take stock of your walk with God. Are there areas where it seems you have drifted? Share any of the five areas with a fellow brother or sister and spend some time praying.

Further reading: 1 Pet 5:8

*"My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body. Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways. Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil."*

**- Proverbs 4:20-27 (NIV)**

# THIS GREAT SALVATION

DAY 5

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## Hebrews 2:1-4

*...how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?*

Going to church was a normal standard in our home when I grew up with my uncle and his family. Later on, studying the Bible to become a disciple of Jesus opened my eyes to the truth that I was not saved, despite my regular church attendance. Praise God for those whom God used to study his word, the Bible, with me. Coming out of the water of baptism confirmed God's gift of salvation to me. This propelled me to get my friends to share the same experience. Indeed, salvation is an amazing gift!

What is your conversion story? Take a few minutes to think through it!

For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:9–10). In yesterday's devotional, we learned about the need to pay careful attention to the things we have heard; to all that has been preached and taught to us from the beginning of our Christian journey—so that we do not drift away. Today's reading is calling us to see how priceless the faith we have received is. Faith is good, but more importantly, our faith must point to Christ.

Just as Christ is greater than angels, so his message is more important than the message of angels. No one will escape God's punishment if he or she is indifferent to the salvation Jesus offers.

How great is this salvation?

It is so great that Jesus himself came down from heaven to secure it for us. It was confirmed to us by those who heard him, that is, the apostles.

These men were ready to lay down their lives for the salvation message. God continued to authenticate it with signs and miracles that accompanied his spoken word. (Heb 2:4)

### **The blessings of salvation:**

Through Jesus, we receive mercy from God (Lk. 1:72).

Through Jesus, we are justified by faith (Gal. 3:6–9).

Through Jesus, we have peace with God (Ephesians 2:14–18).

Through Jesus, we have holiness and righteousness (Ephesians 4:23–24).

Through Jesus, we are reconciled to God (Colossians 1:20).

Through Jesus, we have light and guidance. (1 John 1:7)

Through Jesus, we have the hope of eternity (2 Cor. 5:1).

How can we take our salvation for granted?

In any relationship, be it marriage, friendship, or our relationship with God, after a while, it is easy to take things for granted and lose the zeal we had at first. Here are a few ways we could take our salvation for granted:

- We can become hardened in rebellion and turn away from God (Rev. 3:5).

God influences us for good, but He does not take away our free will to choose.

- Another way we can take our salvation for granted is by consistently living without striving to make changes. This can be dangerous. (John 15:6)

Those who leave the gospel of Jesus will switch from being saved to being condemned. (Galatians 1:6-9)

- Turning from Jesus because of testing and hardships. (Luke 8:15)

- Embracing sinful lifestyles that are inconsistent with repentant faith. (Heb. 10:26–27)

- A lack of gratitude (1 Thess. 5:18)

- When you keep getting involved in all kinds of sins, believing there is grace, (Rom. 6:1-2)

## Conclusion

Here are ways anyone can take his or her salvation for granted. We must watch out for these areas in our lives. Our salvation must remain a precious gift to us.

## Call to Action

Share your conversion story with someone. Are there ways you have taken your salvation for granted? Identify any, share with a fellow brother or sister, and spend some time praying.

**Further Reading:** Matt 13:44–45





## BIG BROTHER JESUS

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## Hebrews 2:10-18

*"Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters."*

Today's reading provides us with an amazing, profound, and inspiring revelation!

The supremacy of our Lord Jesus Christ, as described in the book of Hebrews, is invigorating. It gives energy and fills one with indescribable joy and excitement. What a birthright to have! Think about it. It is beautiful and amazing to share a lineage with Christ. This is highly incomparable to how earthly kings and queens exhibit royalty. Isn't it awesome that our lineage with Christ is from here to eternity? Have you paused to consider this honour and privilege? Despite our lack of faith, selfishness, arrogance, conceit, lies, ungodliness, hatred, malice, and so on, Jesus is not ashamed of calling us brothers and sisters. Can any lineage be greater than this?

The passage today also gives us a glimpse of His flesh and blood experiences. Jesus endured the persecutions, sufferings, and punishments that brought us salvation. We also remember His first-hand struggle with intense temptations, which he overcame for our sake. Whenever you feel lonely in suffering or overcome with worries, anxiety, or the struggle with sin, remember Jesus. When doubts, unbelief, and uncertainties set in, remember that you have a big brother in Jesus who went through it all too.

Brothers and sisters, how do you feel knowing that you belong to the Jesus family?

Do you truly understand your relationship with Christ?

Are you living up to the example of your big brother, Jesus?

Families have common traits; what are yours in Christ?

How can this amazing revelation reflect on your love for everyone around you?

Are you excited about proclaiming your big brother to your colleagues, business associates, and friends?

## **Conclusion**

Don't let your love for money, position, career, or any worldly possessions or pleasures deprive you of holding firmly to this divinely given privilege of having Jesus as a big brother.

## **Call to action:**

Make it a goal to always refocus your heart on your big brother Jesus. Through him, your soul can be renewed with passion for others.

**Further reading:** John 15:15; John 20:17



*"The eyes of the Lord are in every place,  
keeping watch on the evil and the good."*

*- Proverbs 15:3 (ESV)*

*"The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous  
and his ears toward their cry."*

*- Psalm 34:15 (ESV)*

**Hebrews 3:1-6**

*Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest ...*

If you have ever been in love before, I am sure you know what it's like to have your thoughts fixed on someone. When I was dating, my thoughts were always preoccupied with when I would get to see or talk to my special friend and the great time we would have in each other's company when together. Thinking about someone amazing to you is never a burden.

It follows then that today's scripture calls us to fix our thoughts on Jesus, not as a random command but because of the awesome Lord that He is. Think about all we have learned about the person and power of the One we are following. Jesus is God's complete representation. Jesus is superior to the angels and the prophets. Besides all this, Jesus became like you and me and is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters. This Jesus is thus the only one who is worthy of occupying our hearts, minds, and thoughts daily.

Brothers and Sisters, it is only when our minds are fixed on Jesus that we can have the right motivation to obey God and to keep running the Christian race. When I recall times in my life when my faith was low, serving God seemed burdensome, and excuses for lukewarmness were many, at those times, what revived me was not the words of men. It was thinking and reminding myself of Jesus and all that He is to me. In times when discouragement seemed overwhelming and my heart entertained the fear of different kinds, I gained peace not from man but by remembering all that Jesus promised and all that I have seen him do in the past. At times when I was stubborn and struggled with forgiveness, it was the thoughts of Jesus and the price he had to pay for my sins that humbled me and enabled me to let go.

I am sure it has been the same for you. Conversely, when our thoughts are no longer centred on Christ but on problems or personalities, we start to sink like Peter. He walked majestically on the water with Jesus until he began focusing on the wind and waves around him.

## **Conclusion**

What occupies your thoughts the most? Let us be determined to concentrate fully on Master Jesus this year.

## **Call to Action**

Commit your thought life to God today. Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you how to fix your mind on Jesus throughout the day, starting with a time of daily meditation and prayer.

**Further reading:** **Matt** 14:25–31; **Col** 3:1–3



# THE POWER OF ENCOURAGEMENT

DAY 8

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## Hebrews 3:12-13

*...But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called 'Today,' ...*

In our journey of faith, we often face trials, doubts, and temptations in our hearts. During these times, encouragement plays a crucial role in strengthening us and helping us persevere. The book of Hebrews offers valuable insights into the power of encouragement. Today's passage helps us understand how we can encourage one another in our daily walk with God.

I strongly believe that the country we live in presently is affecting the majority of us physically, financially, emotionally, and spiritually. Even if not at the same time or in the same way, we all face it. Hence, for us to grow in our small groups, we need to ensure that, as brothers and sisters, we encourage one another so as not to give in to the deceitfulness of sin. We are all in this together.

I am presently in the School of Missions, and it's an ample opportunity to be encouraged and trained by awesome leaders and disciples who are always there to correct me, advise me, and train me daily on this path to become mature in the faith. In return, I take time to encourage teenagers and campus students, singles, and friends by calling, texting, and spending quality time because they also face pressure daily. I am forever grateful for every bit of time I have spent with believers. By daily reaching out to friends, young and old, disciples, and even the leaders, you are strengthening someone. Keep it up.

Who are you helping to see to it in their daily lives? Who are you encouraging daily? Whom do you call, text, or pray for? Do you get to know people's prayer requests or great testimonies? This new year, see to it!

## **Conclusion**

Through daily encouragement, we can guard our hearts, strengthen our faith, and resist the deceitfulness of sin. As we support and uplift one another, we fulfil the call to "encourage one another daily." May we be diligent in our faith and proactive in encouraging one another, building a strong foundation for our journey with God in our faith and community.

## **Call to Action**

Consider these steps to harness the power of encouragement:


- Regularly connect with other believers and share your faith journey.
- Offer words of affirmation, support, and prayers to those in need.
- Be open to receiving encouragement as well.
- Be a good listener and offer support to those going through tough times.
- Celebrate the accomplishments of one another.
- Pray for one another and be available.

**Further Reading:** Ecclesiastes 4:9–10

### Hebrews 3:7–11, 4:1–13

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...So, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion."

ne of the least-achieved activities on anyone's to-do list is rest. Although our minds and bodies crave it, we seldom prioritise it. We tell ourselves, "I need a rest," yet the next minute, we are engaged in a strenuous activity. Why do we resist rest when we know the result is good for us?

The Theological Dictionary describes "rest" as "*cessation from motion; peace and quiet, etc.*" All through the Scripture, God promises to give his children rest (Deuteronomy 2:9; Joshua 11:23).

### **God's rest is a call to stop all work/labour/toil. (Genesis 2:2)**

God ceased all his work on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of creation. He rested!

Think about the time before you were called to be a disciple and how you were enslaved by your sins and riddled with guilt. You sought to justify yourself with shallow acts of goodness here and there, yet there seemed to be a void and a reason to fall into old habits. God has given us rest through our relationship with his Son, Jesus. Through him, we have relinquished our old selves.

### **God's rest is a call to Peace and Quiet (Zephaniah 3:17).**

Before God began his work of creation, chaos, disorder, and emptiness existed in the universe, yet his Spirit was not far away from the emptiness of the earth (Genesis 1:1–2, MSG).

Today, this chaos still exists in our world; the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, political tension, and economic hardships are just some of the global strife. Even in our hearts, we fight fear, doubt, envy, etc. God is never far away. He has promised to calm and silence all the noise in our hearts with his love.

## Why do we resist God's rest?

As we read in today's passage, the Israelites rebelled against God's rest. Therefore, to answer this question, we must look into the past so that we can address the present.

- **Lack of trust or faith in God (Exodus 5:10–11)**

The Israelites, facing danger, verbally proclaimed that their old life in Egypt was better than the uncertainty of God's promised rest. When faced with pressure, they failed to put their faith in God. We must have absolute and resolute faith in the path God has set us to walk through.

- **When we believe our problems are bigger than God (Numbers 4:1–10),**

The Israelites were faced with a new problem in the land God had given them—giants! They complained and quaked in fear, wishing instead to be back in Egypt. God's invitation into his rest is to relinquish control over our fears, doubts, and problems and allow him to take the lead in our lives. Oftentimes, our problems become "giants," thus keeping us from experiencing God's divine power.

## When do we begin to experience God's rest?

The Hebrew writer seems to suggest that experiencing God's rest begins here on earth. It is not a call to cease working for our daily bread, but rather to cease our attempts to justify ourselves in God's presence by our works and strivings and to trust in Christ's salvation of our souls. (Matt 11:28) The rest we experience now is only a foretaste of the eternal rest with God, the "Sabbath rest," devoid of earthly toiling and strife.

## Conclusion

Hebrews 3:7–11 leaves us with a stern warning of the consequences of not entering God's rest. Many Israelites perished in the desert; others were killed by snake bites, plagues, and the sword because they rebelled against God. God promises a rest for our bodies and souls; the choice is ours to make.



## Call to Action

As we journey through 2024, we must remain intentional in guarding our hearts. Many distractions will come to keep our minds and hearts preoccupied with godless activity. When faced with such circumstances, we must always choose God's rest.

**Further Reading:** Matt 11:28

*"When you rest, you catch your breath and it holds you up,  
like water wings..."*

- Anne Lamott

*"There is virtue in work and there is virtue in rest. Use both  
and overlook neither."*

- Alan Cohen

*"If you get tired, learn to rest, not to quit."*

- Banský

*"Sometimes you need to give yourself a break when you've  
had a lot of life change."*

- Barbara Freethy

*"Renewal is what happens when you realize that some of  
this stuff you've been carrying around doesn't matter."*

- Rob Bell

*"We must always change, renew, rejuvenate ourselves,  
otherwise we harden."*

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

*"Real rest feels like every cell is thanking you for taking care  
of you. It's calm, not full of checklists and chores. It's simple:  
not multitasking; not fixing broken things."*

- Jennifer Williamson

# JESUS:

BOOK  
2

# Humble And Merciful High Priest

Chapter 5 - 7



[Hebrews  
Chapter 5](#)

[Hebrews  
Chapter 6](#)

[Hebrews  
Chapter 7](#)

### **Heb 4:14-16**

*14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*  
NIV

### **JESUS: HUMBLE AND MERCIFUL HIGH PRIEST (HEBREWS 5-7)**

**Day 10** – A portrait of Christ's Life.

**Day 11** – Onto Maturity.

**Day 12** – The Certainty of God's Promise

**Day 13** – The Superior Priesthood

## A PORTRAIT OF CHRIST'S LIFE

[Back To Contents](#)**Heb 4:14-16, 5:1-10**

*During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.*

If you are familiar with world history, you will remember the story of Alexander the Great, a young Greek king who spent most of his reign campaigning throughout Western Asia and Egypt. He is widely considered to be one of the world's greatest military generals.

Visiting his military formations unannounced was one thing Alexander loved doing. In one of those visits, Alexander met his officers, who were interrogating a soldier who had tried to escape from the front lines. The distracted soldier had a craving for the civilian life of idleness, relaxation, and enjoyment.

Alexander asked the deserter, "What is your name?" Shaky and fearful, the young soldier replied, "Alexander." Rattled by this coincidence, Alexander the Great addressed the deserter: "Young man, there is no life better than living up to your name. If one Alexander can be at the forefront as a mighty conqueror, it will be a huge failure on the part of a second Alexander to fade into nothingness. You must get the big picture."

It is recorded that the lily-livered deserter rose to become one of the most trusted generals of Alexander the Great.

In any movement, the biggest threat to success is the presence of those not sold out to the objectives of the larger flock. They always feel the grass is greener on the other side.

The first-century church had this challenge as well. This is why the Book of Hebrews was crafted to help a generation of Jewish Christians who were sorely tempted to return to Judaism.

These early Christians were called, like the young deserter, to see the big picture—the portrait of Christ, whose blood had transformed every one of them from darkness into his wonderful light.

From 4 vs. 14–16, we can see the portrait of a high priest who can feel what we feel and empathise with our weaknesses. Jesus can relate to whatever you and I might be going through. We can appreciate him for not only representing us sinful people before God but also for bringing us back into fellowship with God through his work on our behalf.

From verses 7–10, we see the portrait of a humble and reverent Son. Even with his unique elevation as high priest, Jesus' reverent submission was the trump card of his ultimate success. This presents a great lesson for those who desire to run the Christian race to the end.

Despite his elevation, Jesus was not exempted from the challenges of life. He experienced the same things we do today. Even as our great high priest, we see his total reliance on God. Jesus would often go to the wilderness and pray.

The point is to show that we have the same access to the Father while on earth. Despite his intimate relationship with his Father, Jesus still submitted his will to Him through suffering.

We must never fall for the erroneous doctrine that, as children of God, we are immune to suffering. Jesus was called to walk the path of obedience through suffering, and that is exactly what every true follower of Jesus should do. We must not allow our difficulties to cause us to think that something has gone wrong with our relationship with God. Trials test our faith and our endurance.

Let us look up to Jesus for help.

### **Call to Action**

- Write down the things that easily distract you in your Christian walk, share them with a disciple, and offer up prayers to God in reverent submission.

**Further Reading:** Deuteronomy 31:6; John 16:1-33

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 ORDER TREATING SHARE MOREOVER SUBMIT THEM HOW TO  
 CHILDREN GOD US FATHER WHO  
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 PRODUCES SEEMS THAT GOOD DISCIPLINES  
 HOWEVER  
 THEN HARDSHIP UNDERGOES BEST TRUE HARVEST HUMAN PAINFUL RESPECTED PLEASANT

## ONTO MATURITY

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### Hebrews 5:11–6:12

*...Therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity... (ESV)*

In our passage today, the brilliant Hebrew author invites us to go beyond what he calls the elementary teachings and fundamentals of Christianity and to pursue maturity (spiritual growth).

The scripture stresses how important it is to keep growing in our faith and not get static in our comprehension of God's Word. Certain members of this Christian community (vs. 11) had remained spiritually disengaged, failing to make the expected progress in their faith-in-Jesus journey.

I believe this calls on all who belong to Jesus and follow him to pursue a deeper understanding of God's truth. We are urged to move beyond the core beliefs of Christianity, which include the **"foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, instructions on baptism, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment."** The goal is for us to become more knowledgeable in our faith, to be capable of telling right from wrong, and to become competent teachers to others.

Go beyond the elementary teachings and focus on understanding what it takes to mature in Christ. Have a deliberate growth plan and commit to making an effort to grow deeper in your faith through Bible study. Seek guidance by asking questions from more mature Christians on how to grow in different areas, including sharing your faith and studying the Bible with others.

*"But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil." Heb 5:14 ESV*

Discipline is attained and developed through “constant practice.” I learned consistency in my prayer life and my Bible studies through constant practice. I made this my goal and kept working at it. I can attest that over time, I have become much stronger and more consistent in both. Check the list at the end of this devotional to choose an area of discipline. Make it your goal, through constant practice, to grow in one or two of these areas this year.

**Conclusion**

How are you doing in your spiritual growth and maturity? Hebrews 5:4–12 contains a strong warning statement regarding the dangers and potential consequences of losing one's faith. It highlights how serious it is to turn away from the truth and how hard it is to win back someone who has consciously rejected the faith. It goes further to emphasise how crucial it is for us to hold firm to our convictions amid difficulties and trials. Despite the passage's severe outlook, its ultimate message to us is one of faithfulness and endurance in the Christian life.

**Call to Action:**

Choose from Richard Forster's helpful list of Spiritual Disciplines, an area or two that you will grow in this year:

<u>Inward Disciplines</u>	<u>Outward Disciplines</u>	<u>Corporate Disciplines</u>
Bible Study	Simplicity	Confession
Prayer	Solitude	Worship
Meditation	Submission	Guidance
Fasting	Service	Celebration

For more on these, I encourage you to read Richard Foster's excellent book, “Celebration of Discipline.”\*.

**Further Reading:** Ephesians 4:13; Psalm 143

\*Richard J. Foster, “Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth.” 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition HarperCollins e-books.



# Spiritual Disciplines

E N Q J R E M G N I K A T K S I R  
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 S T R F C G U W O R S H I P X Y B  
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unity	celebration	solitude	worship
meditation	mindfulness	service	slowing
waiting	gratitude	forgiveness	bible study
journaling	humility	prayer	risk taking
unplugging	stewardship	fasting	encouragement

## THE CERTAINTY OF GOD'S PROMISE

### Hebrews 6:13 – 20

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We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure

**T**hroughout the Bible, we see how God made individual promises to his people.

- Noah (Gen 8:22)
- Abraham (Gen 12:1-3, Gen 15:4-6)
- Jacob (Gen 28:12-17)
- Moses (Exodus 3: 16-17)
- Joshua (Josh 1:1-9)
- David (2 Sam 7: 8-17)

God also gave the nation of Israel a solemn promise (Exodus 19:4-6) which we know today as the old covenant. It was a promise that God would make the descendants of Abraham His treasured possession if they would fully obey His commands. This covenant comprised rules and laws as well as blessings and curses. Our reading today teaches us how seriously God takes his promises and the assurance we have that he will do what he said he would do.

Consider these verses:

*You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled.*

- Joshua 23:14

*...The Lord is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does*

- Ps 145:13b

*For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ.*

- 2 Cor 1:20

God went as far as confirming his promises with an oath. The Scripture makes us understand that it is impossible for God to lie. Indeed, we serve a faithful and trustworthy God!

Just as it was for the original readers of the Hebrew letter, we who read today are faced with a myriad of challenges to our faith. It is easy to give in to doubt or discouragement. Stay anchored and firm. Walk the path of obedience. God's promises will come through.

### **Conclusion**

No matter how hard life is, always remember that you have all of God's promises made manifest in Christ and a high priest who not only paid for all your sins with his blood but is also interceding for you as you go through life. How do you feel being a beneficiary of this promise? Empowered? Joyful? Confident?

### **Call to Action**

Spend time thanking God for all his promises to you.

### **Further Reading:**

Galatians 3:26-27. Hebrews 4:15-16, 6:13-19. Ezekiel 37: 26-27.

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## THE SUPERIOR PRIESTHOOD

Hebrews 7:1-28

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Today, we read about the priesthood of Jesus. Hebrews is the only New Testament book that describes Jesus as a “high priest.” How did it come about? How is Jesus’ priesthood superior to all others? What does this mean for you and me today?

### What does it mean to be a priest?

From the Greek word “presbyteros, which means “Elder”, priests represented the people before God and offered the various sacrifices prescribed in the law. Melchizedek was the first person mentioned in the Bible as a high priest of God in **Genesis 14:18–20**.

### Who is Melchizedek?

He was the King of Salem and the Priest of God Most High. He appeared “mysteriously” in **Gen 14:18–20**. The Bible says nothing about his ancestry or lineage. He blessed Abram, and Abram gave him tenths (a tithe) of everything. This shows that Melchizedek superseded Abram.

His name means King of Righteousness or King of Peace. We see Jesus bearing these same titles. (**Jer 23:6, Is 9:6**) David prophesied in **Ps 110:4** about the coming Messiah (Jesus), who would be a priest forever in the same order as that of Melchizedek.

### Jesus’ priesthood is superior.

The Old Testament priests who came later were not like Melchizedek. They had to be descendants of Levi. The High Priest could only enter the Holy of Holies once a year to offer the blood of animals in atonement for his sin and the sin of all Israelites. No high priest remained in office forever, as death would end their service.

Jesus was descended from Judah, not Levi. So from a human point of view, he was not in line to be a priest, much less a High Priest. Jesus became a priest with an oath (assurance) from God (**Heb 7:21**), not as a result of his lineage. He serves forever because of the power of his indestructible life. As our High Priest, Jesus offered the sacrifice for our sins by carrying his own blood into the heavenly temple rather than the man-made temple in Jerusalem, and it was done once and for all.

### **The priesthood today**

**1 Peter 2:9** tells us that as the people of God, we are a royal priesthood. Our duty as priests is to bring God to people and to bring people to God.

Christ is our all-in-all. He is our High Priest. Are you still running around seeking some priest or prophet to pray for you and intercede on your behalf? We do not need a human intercessor because only Jesus is holy, blameless, and sinless, and he has sacrificed for all our sins. He tore down the temple curtain (Matthew 27:51), opening the way to the throne of grace so we could enjoy communion with our Abba Father.

What is stopping you from enjoying your heritage?  
Are you carrying out your duty as a royal priest?

### **Conclusion**

Melchizedek was King and Priest. Jesus is King and Priest forever. Who are you in Christ? Do you truly know and understand? How will a conviction about your position in Christ transform the way you live?

### **Call to Action**

As a royal priest, make a list of people that you will start praying for and bringing to God by sharing your faith and the scriptures with them this year.

**Further Reading:** Exodus 19:6

**More on Melchizedek:**

<https://bit.ly/3RGwmQn>

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FATHER  
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GOD  
ABRAHAM  
BEGINNING  
RESEMBLING  
RETURNING  
RIGHTEOUSNESS  
REMAINS

# JESUS: Mediator of a New & Better Covenant:

Chapter 8 - 10



[Hebrews Chapter 8](#)

[Hebrews Chapter 9](#)

[Hebrews Chapter 10](#)



**Heb 7:22**

*22 Because of this oath, Jesus has become the  
guarantee of a better covenant.*

NIV

**JESUS: MEDIATOR OF A NEW & BETTER COVENANT:**

**Day 14** – Old vs New Covenant (1)

“I will write my law in their hearts

**Day 15** – Old vs New Covenant (2)

“The blood of Christ”

**Day 16** – Old vs New Covenant (3)

“Once and for All” Salvation & Judgment

**Day 17** – Keeping a Pure Heart.

**Day 18** – Spur One Another On.

**Day 19** – Tough Talk

**Day 20** – Reward of Perseverance

## OLD VS. NEW COVENANT: BETTER PROMISES

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### Hebrews 8

*"I will write my law on their hearts..."*

*I* sometimes ask the elderly among us what the colonial era before 1960 was like since I have no experiential knowledge of that time. I only read or hear stories of how we spent shillings and pence, sang the British anthem in schools, and celebrated "Empire Day." One thing is for sure: Despite all the troubles in our modern democracy today, no one wants to go back to the era of colonial masters. With self-determination in governance, something infinitely better is now in place.

Today we begin learning about the blessing of the spiritual era in which we live—the era of the New Testament.

In the last few days, we learned about the priesthood of Jesus Christ, our saviour and mediator, and how his priesthood is different from and superior to that which existed in the Levitical order. The Hebrew writer now explains to us in Heb 8:6 that it is not just Jesus' priesthood that is superior, but the covenant he has ushered in, which is far more wonderful and glorious.

What is it about the new covenant that makes it better? To understand this, we must compare it to the old.

If we lived under the old covenant, we would have had to memorise and keep over 600 laws about food, sacrifices, clothing, farming, sabbaths, cleansings, monthly and yearly feasts, and a host of other things. (James 2:10)

We would know Yahweh, but only in a distant manner. He would not be to us the "Abba" or "Daddy" that we can boldly approach and fellowship with 24/7. (Rom 8:15-16)

We would not have the companionship of the Spirit, prompting us, guiding us, and causing God's word to well up inside us. (John 7:37-39)

We would not have the freedom in our worship of God that we enjoy today. We are free to be creative, spontaneous, and unhindered in our expression of love and service to The Father, rather than obliged to follow rules and regimentation. (Gal 5:1)

This new covenant brings forgiveness for sins as well as transformed hearts. In Deuteronomy 30:6, God promised that our hearts would be circumcised so that we might love him fully and with all our hearts and souls. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, who changes us from within after the washing of water in baptism that made us God's people (Ezk. 36:24–28).

It had always been God's plan to eventually bring his people into this new and better covenant relationship. It was the subject of much Old Testament prophecy. (Is 59:21? Is 61:8? Ezk. 16:60?)

It was fulfilled through Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. This promise is for you if you are a follower of Christ. (Matt 28:20, Acts 2:39) How blessed we are to be the people standing on better promises!

## **Conclusion**

The Old Testament Law was a temporary measure to lead people to Christ, or, to put it another way, the Law was like our tutor to lead us to Christ. We no longer need that tutor now that Christ has come. As New Testament Christians, we are no longer bound or obligated to keep Old Testament laws. Jesus is the mediator of this new covenant, and we are all children of God through faith and heirs of the promises this covenant contains.

Let us rejoice in our salvation. It is easy to take for granted the wonderful grace of being a new covenant people of God. We have so much in our favour! This should inspire us to give our hearts and our best to God.

## Call to Action

With your freedom in Christ, think of one creative thing that you can do for God this week. Pray about it, share it with someone who can encourage you, and go ahead and do what the Spirit has put on your heart!

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<https://bit.ly/GodsPromisesVersesInTheBible>



## OLD VS. NEW COVENANT: THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

### Hebrews 9:1-22

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*...and without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.*

**F**rom time immemorial, people have viewed blood as the life force of any living creature. (Ex 17:14) Since blood gives life, sacred covenants were sealed with blood.

Once every year, on the day of Atonement, the Old Testament High Priest had the duty to enter the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle with the blood of animals to make atonement for his sin and the sin of all the people. Even though these sacrifices were made year after year, the blood of bulls and goats was never an effective cleanser of sin. To put it another way, it was like administering a painkiller for malaria. A painkiller will relieve some symptoms, but it cannot treat the underlying cause of malaria. In the same way, animal sacrifices only served as a kind of “stop-gap” or temporary measure until a time when the permanent “cure” for man’s sin would be in place.

As we learned earlier, God’s plan has always been to enter into a new and enduring covenant with his people. How would this covenant be enacted? Only with the blood of a spotless and unblemished lamb. (1 Pet 1:19) That lamb was Christ. Jesus came to live among us and die for us so that his life-giving blood would cure us of sin’s disease.

### What is the power of the blood of Jesus?

- Jesus’ blood sealed the new covenant and secured the forgiveness of our sins. (Matt 26:28)
- Jesus gave his blood as the ransom to secure our freedom from Satan’s camp. (Rev 5:9).
- By his blood, we are now redeemed, justified, and sanctified. (Rom 5:9, Eph 1:7)
- The shed blood of Christ makes peace and reconciliation possible. (Col 1:20, Eph 2:13)

## Conclusion

Today, sin is killing more people than all diseases combined. But the cure is available and free! It is the precious blood of Christ.

## Call to Action

Have you received God's salvation from sin by being washed in the blood of the Lamb through repentance and baptism? (Mk 16:16, Acts 2:38) If not, why not decide today?

Have you been saved by the blood of Christ but are still toying with sin? Ask Jesus to cleanse and purify you with his blood.

Let this be a new beginning.

**Further Reading:** 1 John 1:7; Rev 12:11

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## OLD VS. NEW COVENANT: SALVATION & JUDGEMENT

Hebrews 9:23–28, 10:1–18

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**Just** as people are destined to die once and, after that, to face judgement, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many, and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

The sacrifice of Jesus, which inaugurated the new covenant, is the ultimate and final sacrifice. It was once and for all. We are done with bringing sheep, goats, bulls, or pigeons over and over again as offerings. Jesus' blood has the power and potency to cleanse our past, present, and future sins. Hallelujah!

Have you ever wondered, sometimes, whether God has *really* forgiven you? I have! Do you often hear the accuser of God's people whispering to you that an angry and mean God has piled your sins high in front of him and is ready to punish you for every single one of them? Listen to what God's word says:

*... we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all (Heb 10:10).*

*Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more. (Heb 10:17)*

God chooses not to remember our sins, but we should never forget them! Why? So that we can remain deeply grateful for the magnitude of our salvation.

Just as Christ's salvation is complete, so is His judgement. *For we will all stand before the judgement seat of God (Romans 14:10).*

*So then each of us will give an account of ourselves to God (Rom 14:12).*

How then should we live our lives, knowing the great price that was paid to save us and the account we will one day give for it?

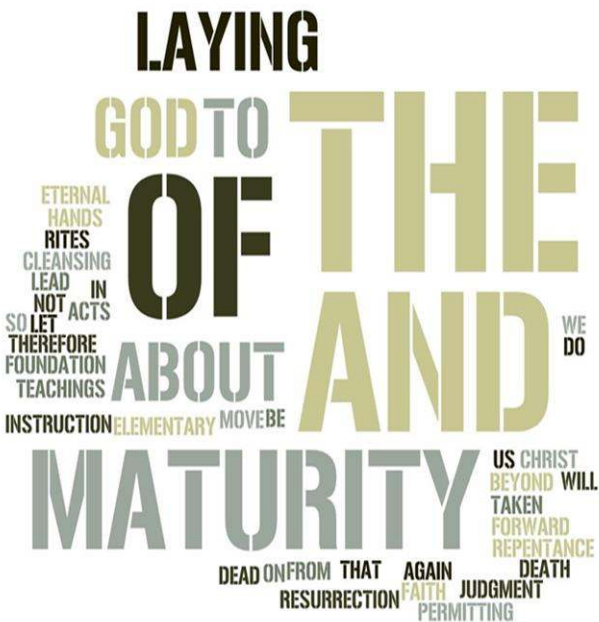
Conclusion

Jesus' sacrifice for us is final and complete, once and for all! Therefore, let us take hold of the life being offered to us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment.

Call To Action

Take time today just to thank God for the forgiveness of your sins. It helps to remember them and mention them specifically. Then ask God to help you overcome anything that might stand against you on the day of judgement.

Further Reading: 1 Tim 1:15-17 1 John 4:17






#### Hebrews 10:19-23

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*...since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.*

ur journey through life is often marked by trials, temptations, and tribulations that leave us yearning for a guiding light, a beacon of hope, and a connection with something greater than ourselves. In the depths of our hearts, there is a profound desire to transcend the limitations of our earthly existence and seek solace in God.

This connection with God is made possible through the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who opened the gate for us to a profound personal relationship with God. His selfless act of love paved the way for us to shed the burden of sin and guilt, allowing us to freely approach God with unwavering faith and open and pure hearts. Connecting with God can also be a yearning to connect with something beyond the tangible, to find solace and meaning in the vastness of the universe. Whether through prayer, meditation, or simply a deep appreciation for the beauty of nature, this connection can manifest in various forms.

One way that we can connect with God is simply by coming to him with a sincere and pure heart.

I remember a certain time when I had to pour out my heart to my discipling partner in confession of some wrongdoings back in my school days. After that confession, my heart became light and free of guilt. I became very much alive in Christ because of it. Each time I hold on to sins and struggles, my heart becomes very heavy. I become weak, and it's difficult even to engage in any activity that concerns the church or community of believers. I am forever grateful for those in my life who ensure I am held accountable.

We all need to be open to confessing our sins and struggles to one another and endure we keep a pure heart.

A pure heart is free from sin, deceit, and worldly distractions. It is a heart that is open to love, compassion, and understanding.

A sincere heart, as encouraged in the Book of Hebrews, approaches God with honesty, authenticity, and transparency. It involves shedding our masks and pretences, admitting our imperfections, and embracing vulnerability in our relationship with God.

Drawing near to God is not merely a religious obligation; it is a great privilege and an invitation to experience profound joy and peace. It is a journey of self-discovery, transformation, and deepening our connection to the divine spark within each of us. Is there anything holding you back right now from drawing close to God?

## **Conclusion**

Remember, the path to a deeper connection with God is a personal and unique journey. There is no right or wrong way to approach God. What God seeks is the sincerity of your heart and the willingness to open yourself to the transformative power of faith.

## **Call to Action**

Here are some steps to cultivate a deeper connection with God and maintain a pure heart.

- Dedicate time each day to prayer, meditation, or reflection, creating a space for quiet time with God.
- Be intentional in filling up your mind with what is pure, trustworthy, and noble.
- Seek out like-minded individuals who share your faith or spiritual aspirations, forming a supportive community that encourages spiritual growth and development.
- Engage in acts of kindness and love towards others as a way of expressing your connection to God.
- Embrace the beauty and wonder of nature, recognising God's presence in the designs of the universe and the vastness of creation.

**Further Reading:** Philippians 4:8

### Hebrews 10:24–25

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds.*

*I*magine a group of horses racing down a track. Each horse has a jockey urging them forward. The jockeys use spurs to motivate the horses to run their best. The horses feel the gentle pressure of the spurs and respond with increased speed and determination.

In continuation of yesterday's devotional on keeping a pure heart, we must strive to be like-minded in faith and support each other. The Scripture encourages us to motivate and inspire one another in our faith journey. Just as jockeys use spurs to encourage their horses, we are called to use our words and actions to lift our fellow brothers and sisters, young and old.

We now live in a world where mental health is crucial. People tend to lose interest in so many godly things. When we are feeling weary or discouraged, the support amongst us can be a powerful source of strength. By coming together, we can remind each other of God's love and grace, and we can find the strength to keep pressing on. We can achieve so much when we encourage one another to do good deeds. Never forget that love is equally important in our midst. By this, people will know that we are Christians by the love we share.

Today, take some time to consider who you can spur on. Who needs a word of encouragement, a helping hand, some support, or a prayer for strength? Let us all be spurred in each other's lives, propelling one another towards love and good deeds as we follow the path God has set before us.

### Conclusion

Dear brothers and sisters in faith, as we reflect on the powerful message of Hebrews 10:24, we are called to a higher purpose.

We should welcome the spurring of others and actively seek out those who will call us higher. Let's actively participate in building a community of faith that uplifts, encourages, and supports one another. In a world that often seems divided and full of strife, our unity as believers can be a shining beacon of hope and love.

### **Call to Action**

Be open and vulnerable. Check on a brother or sister today. Decide on one thing you can do to promote acts of love and kindness in your community. Think of some individuals who you can support and pray for right now.

In your small group, come up with ways to support each other and also celebrate each other's achievements.

**Additional Reading:** Ecclesiastes 4:9–10, 1 Samuel 14:1–14



## TOUGH TALK (WARNING AGAINST DELIBERATE SIN)

Hebrews 10:26-31

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

*We* all know that times are hard and are getting harder with no solution in sight. This has caused many of us to lose faith, be discouraged, and even seek ungodly solutions or compromise our godliness on the altar of survival. This may have resulted in our getting burned spiritually.

What does deliberate sin look like?

You knowingly sin against God. You have fallen away from God in your heart. The Cross of Christ no longer has any effect on the way you think or the way you live your life.

The Bible no longer makes sense to you or has a cutting edge in your heart. You do not make godly decisions or take advice based on God's guidance anymore.

Our text scripture for today is one of the most direct, concise, and clear portions of the Bible. God does not mince words.

This is addressing you and me (*those who have received the knowledge of the truth*).

- We know of the deliberate sins we indulge in: lies, deceit, compromising the system (such as bribery, corruption, covering up misdemeanours, not standing up for the truth), sexual sins, etc. 'Subtle' ones: malice, slander, gossip, unforgiveness.
- Rather than repent, we falsely hide under God's mercy, patience, grace, and love (this passage says "*who has insulted the Spirit of grace*"). God's wrath is not to be toyed with.

Even at this stage, God still wants us to turn to Him, and He is ready to receive us. (Is 1:18-20)

Whenever I think of God's instant judgement, it's quite scary. What if God were to treat me like (i) the man of God (1 Kings 13), who lost his life over a 'little indiscretion'; or (ii) Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), who lost their lives because of greed and love of man's accolades? If not for one recorded act of indiscretion on their part, do you think Ananias and Sapphira would be in heaven?

Another fearful example is the story of King Saul, who was chosen by God Himself to be ruler, but from the fallout of his lifestyle, he was abandoned by God; he lived several years bearing the title 'king' but was separated from God. A terrible place to be!

- Where are you today? Are you falsely bearing a title ('Disciple', 'FG Leader', 'Elder') or truly living the life?
- Q: Is the Spirit of God still working in your life?

*The Lord will judge his people. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

The scriptures are full of warnings and rebukes so that we do not mess up our chances of being with God in eternity.

## **Conclusion**

Galatians 6:7-8

Strong warnings may make us uncomfortable, but they are necessary to save our lives. Let's be intentional and urgent in our response.

Be alert and of a sober mind. Resist him, standing firm in the faith (1 Peter 5:8–11).

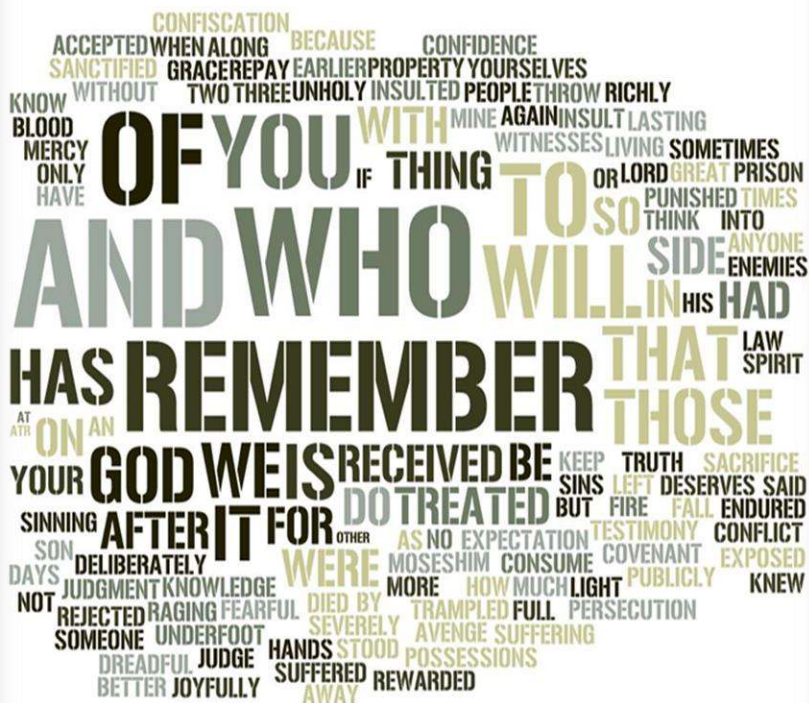
- Be a wise virgin. Be watchful. Do not leave anything to chance. Do not procrastinate (Matt. 25:1–13).
- Run to win the race. It takes self-discipline and strict obedience to the rules (1 Cor. 9:24–27).

- Let us pay more careful attention to our doctrine... so that we do not drift away (Heb. 2:1).

## Call to Action

Daily and regular assessment of self: Am I still in the faith? (Luke 18:8)

**Further Reading:** Rev. 22:10–15; Rom. 6:1–2 Gal. 6:7–10; 2 Pet. 1:10–11



## REWARD OF PERSEVERANCE

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## Hebrews 10:32-39

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

After God's warnings in yesterday's devotional, we see His

promise when we stand firm no matter what.

Remembrance is mostly a good thing. It gives us nostalgic feelings about previous victories and successes—how we endured and overcame them. Remembrance can act as a legacy of the past.

When I read the first few verses of this passage, I remembered our early days in the faith—those exploits, the willingness to go to any length, and the desire to please God no matter the challenges. They expressed their level of faith and deeds. They displayed the purity and innocence of their hearts.

What has changed? Certainly not God and His standards.

- When, like Peter, we take our eyes off Jesus and start seeing the storm' (Matt. 14:27–31),
- When like the parable of the Sower says, we allow our lives to be choked by the 'thorns' of worries, riches, and pleasures (Luke 8:7–14),
- When, like the Israelites who asked for a king, we start comparing and using ourselves or others as the standard (1 Sam. 8:5),
- When we get weary, tired, or self-centered, we take our eyes off the cross. When we become competitive, materialistic, and worldly.
- When God's righteousness is no longer a goal to be fervently pursued, we become mockers and scorers of those who make every effort to remain faithful to God and His standards, labelling them "overly righteous" or "overly spiritual."



The good news and the call today are that there is a 'throne of grace and mercy' that God expects us to always approach.

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

Confidence comes from knowing the facts or truth of a case, believing in them, and then acting on them.

My confidence comes from the following:

- That Jesus died for me.
- That he has called me to be his (John 6:44). This is a privilege that I daily cherish.
- That I should live and run to win the crown.
  - Run with perseverance (Heb. 12:1-2). Life is filled with challenges, distractions, etc., but I can hold on to Jesus.
  - Daily training myself (1 Cor. 9:25-27). My quiet time - Bible study, Prayer and Meditation on His Word.
  - I cannot afford to be careless, tired, and nonchalant in my walk with God. Satan is up and about looking for someone to devour.
- That Jesus will return for me and the other 'wise virgins'. This is assured.
  - His coming is imminent (Matt. 24). The situations and signs all over the world are not encouraging and are probably getting worse by the day. There is an increase in wickedness and godlessness.
  - We should never leave our salvation to chance. We must serve God with all our hearts and help as many people as possible (including our children) to do likewise.

- This race is not in vain. There is a reward—a crown reserved for me and other winners.
  - Are you still in the race?

## Conclusion

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

- Fix your eyes on the finish line. Be determined that nothing will separate you from Jesus or steal your crown.
- Endure the challenges of the race. Know that whatever you are going through right now matters to God. He roots for us daily because we are precious to Him. He will never leave or forsake us.

## Call to Action

- Be intentional about sin. Treat sin as sin (Rom. 6:11–23).
- Stop being careless or nonchalant about your calling and discipleship.

**Further Reading:** 2 Tim 4:8; Heb. 12:2.



# **JESUS:** **Pioneer and** **Perfecter of our** **Faith**

## Chapter 11



[Hebrews Chapter 11](#)

**Deut 31: 6**

*6 Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."*

NIV

**JESUS: Pioneer and Perfecter of our Faith**

**Day 21** – Faith is our Foundation

**Day 22** – Abel, Enoch, Noah: Faith gives, walks & obeys.

**Day 23** – Abraham: Faith goes, sacrifices and receives

**Day 24** – Isaac, Jacob, Joseph: Faith trusts God's plan.

**Day 25** – Moses: Faith refuses sin

**Day 26** – The Prophets & Kings: Faith Brings Victory


**Day 27** – The Martyrs: Faith Brings Suffering

**Day 28** – When God gives His "Thumbs Up":  
Faith commended.

### Hebrews 11:1-3, 6

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*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*

oday we begin an inspiring journey to the hall of faith in Hebrews 11.

In these uncertain times, when economic challenges and adversity seem to surround us, it is crucial to anchor our lives upon the unshakable foundation of faith. The author of Hebrews, in the first three verses of Chapter 11, provides us with a profound perspective on faith that should uplift us and guide us as disciples of Christ.

For me, I see **FAITH** from a three-dimensional angle (3D);

#### 1. Faith is Confidence in the Unseen, vs. 1

Faith is the unwavering trust and conviction that God is faithful, even when we cannot perceive His hand at work in our lives. When we face struggles, it's easy to become disheartened and anxious. However, faith reminds us that God's plans are not always visible, but they are always purposeful.

Just like the heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11—Abraham, Noah, and Moses—who stepped out in faith when they couldn't see the outcome, we too can trust that God is leading us, even when our circumstances look bleak. In your difficulties, let faith be your foundation, knowing that God sees what you cannot and is working for your good.

#### 2. Faith Commends the Faithful, vs. 2

The heroes of faith in the Scriptures were not commended for their wealth, power, or worldly success, but for their unwavering view of God. Remember that God's commendation is not based on your bank account, properties, or physical accomplishments. God commends you for putting your trust in Him.

As disciples, we should seek to be commended by God rather than the world. Faith in God has guided men and women of all ages and generations through the harshest circumstances of life. It is through our faith that we will endure and ultimately prosper, not necessarily in material wealth but in spiritual riches.

### **3. Faith in Creation vs. 3**

This verse reminds us that the world itself was created by God's command out of nothing visible. If God can create the entire universe from nothing, surely He can provide for our needs, even in these times of economic uncertainty.

As disciples, we should take comfort in the knowledge that the same God who created the heavens and the earth is intimately involved in our lives. Our faith in Him is a powerful reminder that He can make a way where there seems to be no way. Just as God spoke the world into existence, He can speak abundance, health, and peace into our lives, transforming our situation beyond our comprehension.

### **4. Faith is key vs. 6**

Scripture makes us understand that we cannot even begin to live a life that is pleasing to God without faith. No wonder Jesus was impressed, not by people's great works but by their great faith. (Matt 8:10, Mk 5:34) The Bible says the righteous shall live by faith. When we are tempted to doubt, let us remember that faith is our victory. (1 Jn 5:4)

## **Conclusion**

Faith is our foundation in the stormy seas of life. Our faith is the assurance that God is at work, even when we cannot see His hand. It is the assurance that our commendation comes from Him, not the world. It is understood that the Creator of the universe is also the Provider of our needs. Therefore, let us hold on to our faith with unwavering confidence, for it will sustain us through every trial and tribulation.

- Write down six (6) ways to put your faith into action.

May your faith be your unshakable foundation, guiding you through the harsh economic realities of our time. As disciples of Christ, may we trust in his promises and lean on the foundation of faith, for in Him we find hope, purpose, and the strength to overcome.

**Further Reading:** Matthew 21:22; 2 Corinthians 5:7



## ABEL, ENOCH, AND NOAH: FAITHFUL EXAMPLES

Hebrews 11:4-7

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*By faith, Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith, he was commended as righteous when God spoke well of his offerings.*

**A**s we enter the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11, we are introduced to three remarkable individuals: **Abel, Enoch, and Noah**. Their stories exemplify the essence of faith, each in their unique way, and serve as timeless examples of living a life pleasing to God.

### Abel: **By Faith, We Give**

Abel's faith was demonstrated through his offering to God. He brought an offering that reflected his deep reverence and trust in the Creator. God was pleased with Abel's offering because it was a true act of faith. His faith was not only in the act of giving but also in God's acceptance of it. Abel teaches us that our giving should not be a mere ritual but a genuine expression of trust and devotion. It is by faith that we give, knowing that God honours sincere hearts and righteous offerings.

### Enoch: **By Faith, We Walk**

Enoch's life was characterised by his unique relationship with God. He walked with God in such a way that God took him directly to heaven, sparing him from the experience of death. Enoch's faith was evident in his consistent companionship with God. He teaches us that our faith should be a daily walk, a continuous journey with our Creator. Just as Enoch walked with God, we too can cultivate an intimate and unwavering relationship with Him. It is by faith that we walk with God, knowing that He delights in our company.

### Noah: **By Faith, We Obey**

Noah's faith is perhaps most famously associated with the construction of the ark. In obedience to God's command, he



built an ark to save his family and preserve life on Earth from the impending flood. Noah's faith was not passive; it was active obedience to God's will, even in the face of ridicule and disbelief. Noah's life challenges us to obey God's word, even when it seems impractical or unconventional. It is by faith that we obey, trusting that God's plan is greater than our understanding.

## **Conclusion**

As we look at the lives of Abel, Enoch, and Noah, we see the common thread of faith woven throughout. They give us a holistic view of living by faith:

By faith, we give, offering our hearts and resources with sincerity and trust in God.

- By faith, we walk, cultivating an ongoing relationship with God, not just in times of crisis but in our daily lives.
- By faith, we obey, responding to God's commands with unwavering trust and commitment.

So, let us be inspired by these faithful examples and let faith guide our daily lives. Let us give, walk, and obey in faith, knowing that in doing so, we please God. Just as Abel, Enoch, and Noah's faith left a lasting impact, may our faith also be a testimony to the world around us. In these uncertain times, let our faith shine as a beacon of hope and trust in the One who rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

## **Call to Action**

- Share with someone how you intend to give, walk, and obey Christ faithfully this year.

**Further Reading:** Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 10:17

## ABRAHAM: THE FAITH TO GO, TO SACRIFICE. TO RECEIVE

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Hebrews 11:8–12, 17–19

*Abraham... obeyed and went because of his faith.*

### Faith goes

**H**ave you ever had to leave your comfort zone?

As a ministry staff member, I and my family have had to move to different cities and locations several times. My first reaction is usually filled with uncertainty: where, how, what if...

God told Abram to leave his country and go to a destination yet unknown.

This sojourn started with Abram's father, Terah, who moved with his family to Haran. Abram would no doubt have been comfortable enough not to move, but when God called, Abraham obeyed. It takes faith to go. (Gen.12).

In today's mobile world, change is constant, whether we like it or not. One important question is: how do we stay spiritually strong and faithful during those changes? As Abraham went on his journey, he always built altars to God for prayer and worship and as reminders of God's promise to bless him. Abraham knew he couldn't survive spiritually without regularly renewing his love and loyalty to God. Building altars helped him remember that God was at the centre of his life.

What regular practices do you need to put in place to help you stay centred on God in 2024?

What is God calling you to leave? Your comfort zone? A sinful life or habit?

Where is God asking you to "go" for him this year? Is he asking

you to go meet a need or to go serve in a specific ministry in his church? Is he asking you to go reach out to a soul or to go encourage others?

How would you respond?

## **Faith sacrifices**

*By faith, Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice (vs. 17).*

The same God that promised Abraham offspring as numerous as the stars (Gen. 15) asked him to sacrifice his only son (Gen. 22). What a test! Abraham had a whole night to run in a different direction than Jonah did, but he patiently waited for the break of day to head to Moriah. Abraham reasoned that God would bring his son back to life after he had done what God wanted. He considered his obedience to God to be worship.

Do you feel your faith is being tested in one area or another? God's test is for our durability. He needs our total obedience. Our obedience to him is an act of worship.

## **Faith Receives**

*Abraham received Isaac back from death (vs. 19).*

Abraham received Isaac back, but he also received so much more. What he received was beyond the personal blessing of physical or material wealth.

Imagine Abraham being able to see his spiritual offspring today—you and I, as many as have the kind of faith he had—faith to obey God under all circumstances. This is the fulfillment of the blessing of Abraham and God's promise that through him, all nations would be blessed.

Jesus Christ is a descendant of Abraham. In Christ, any person can receive forgiveness of sins and be in the kingdom of God. In Christ, anyone can receive the blessings of justification, just as

Abraham did. Indeed, from this one man have come spiritual descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

## Conclusion

*If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. (Colossians 3:29).* Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. By faith, he went. By faith, he sacrificed. By faith, he received. We can do the same.

## Call To Action

Pick one area where you will strive to imitate the faith of Abraham. Share with others who can encourage you on your journey.

**Further Reading:** Romans 1:17; Romans 5:1-2; 1Peter 1:6-9



## FAITH SPEAKS TO THE FUTURE

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**Heb 11:20-22 Psalm 22:30-31**

*By faith, Jacob blessed each of Joseph's sons and worshipped as he leaned on the top of his staff.*

As a young boy, I recall a particular year when I wanted to mark my birthday. I was raised by my grandmother, and, seeing my earnest desire, she made every effort to grant my request. I had a memorable celebration. But what stood out for me the most that day was how my grandmother prayed a special prayer for me. I didn't understand every word at the time, but I knew she was mentioning great things about my future. I remember feeling incredibly important and confident. I literally had a bounce in my step when I rose from my knees. Something in me felt that I was destined for greatness because my grandmother had prayed for it for me.

Today we read about the patriarchs and how Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph all spoke prophetically about the future as they prayed and blessed the generations after them. We can find the actual blessings they pronounced and the instructions they gave in Genesis 27, 48, and 50. How did they know what the future held for their children, their grandchildren, and their nation? What the scripture makes us understand is that they spoke by faith.

God spoke the world into existence, and we, who are created in His image, have the capacity to shape life with our words. (Prov 18:21) Words spoken in faith are powerful.

As parents, let us speak positively to and of our children. Let them hear you pray for them. Pronounce blessings on them. Speak by faith about the future you envision for them. You may not see it now, and indeed, their present actions and attitude may seem contrary to your prayer for them, but remember that faith is "confident of what it hopes for and certain of what it does not see." Just as I literally felt my grandmother's prayer lift

me, so our children will feel lifted and strong as a result of our faith in them. The same is true of our other relationships. What would it feel like to have your spouse, one of your siblings, or a very good friend call you early one morning just to shower you with blessings for your future? Great, not so?

How about speaking positively about the future of our nation?

Joseph spoke about the future of Israel. (Heb 11:22) For me, saying anything good about our country is often a struggle because I see the negatives everywhere I turn. I am sure you can relate. This does not mean we should pretend that all is well when it is not, but a faithful attitude will start to produce faithful actions in us and those around us. Let us bless Nigeria and not curse her.

## **Conclusion**

We are all not prophets, but we can speak prophetically as people who have the Spirit of God in them. Faith sees a positive future and trusts God to bring it about.

## **Call to Action**

- Devote your prayers today to ask God's blessing on the future of your children, spouse, family members, or friends. Even if you do not have such relationships right now, faithfully pray as if you do! Pray for generations yet to be born.
- Take time today to pray positively for Nigeria.

**Further Reading** 1 Thess. 5:23; Rom 12:14; Prov 18:20–21

## MOSES: FAITH REFUSES SIN

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## Hebrews 11:23-29

*By faith, Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.*

**F**aith, a noun whose attributes embody the verb, is an action word per se. As succinctly put in Hebrews 11:1, *faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see*. It is easy to have faith in the things we are familiar with. We fix appointments for a day we have yet to see. We are familiar with waking up every morning; hence, it is easy to make plans accordingly. This line of thought suggests that every man has a level of faith in them, but the Bible is not talking about the faith of that level—the type that comes naturally to every man.

The faith that the Bible talks about is extraordinary and divine—the type of faith that refuses to sin. This is the type of faith attributed to men and women in the Bible. A classic example of a man of that type of faith is Moses. He had everything he needed to live like a prince, but he chose the path of everlasting honour devoid of sin.

Moses did not allow what he had within his rights to take his eyes off his purpose. It would have been easy for Moses in Egypt to say, “I can still enjoy both worlds.” As disciples, we sometimes want to do exactly the same thing. By association, we forget who we are, carrying conflicting identities in the process.

It would have taken Moses nothing to identify as a prince of Egypt, but he was circumspect enough to know that that could distract him from his mission. Everyone who has been bought at a price has a mission to nurture a faith that sheds sin.

We may tell ourselves, “I can go to the club, but I will not drink or look at any woman lustfully.” “I like the music. The lyrics do not align with what I should be consuming, but the beat sounds really nice.” That's how we gradually walk into sin. The Bible says

in Genesis 4:6b that "sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it." Cain probably had no intention to hurt his brother, let alone murder him.

Faith can be passive or active. When it is passive, sin encroaches. An active faith refuses to sin because it is always watching and guarding. Our faith must be active. Moses' active faith enabled him to know when to leave and join his kinsmen. He did not allow the common and popular things— instant gratification and pleasure—to truncate his purpose.

Driven by the reward, Moses carried out his assigned duties with the utmost diligence; he overlooked the overwhelming distractions and forged on. If he failed, he would not only fail himself but also the thousands of Israelites whom he was to rescue from Egypt.

## **Conclusion**

Our human instincts tilt towards instant gratification. It takes faith to refuse the pleasurable but fleeting attractions of this life. Where is your faith today? Moses had every reason to live in the moment, but he made a decision. You also have every reason to live in the moment, but what decision are you making? Let your decision be determined by the true reward—God's promised reward.

## **Call to Action**

In what areas do you see yourself easily getting pulled into some attitudes or behaviours that are not expected of a follower of Jesus? What makes it difficult for you to take a stand where necessary? Discuss these with a trusted friend or discipling partner. Pray for deeper faith and conviction.

**Further Reading:** 2 Corinthians 5:7; Ps 31:33



## THE PROPHETS AND KINGS: FAITH BRINGS VICTORY

Hebrews 11:30-35a

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*By faith, the walls of Jericho fell after the people had marched around them for seven days.*

*And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets.*

The above passage unveils a captivating tapestry of faith, weaving together the remarkable stories of individuals whose unwavering trust in God propelled them into extraordinary acts of courage and resilience. Here, we witness the transformative power of faith in action—enabling conquests, overcoming trials, and experiencing divine intervention.

From the conquest of Jericho to the resurrection of the dead, we see the dynamic nature of faith and its profound impact on the lives of those who dared to believe. From today's reading, we see faith taking centre stage, unveiling a tableau of God's faithfulness and the indomitable spirit of those who walked in His promises.

As we know, this passage, and indeed the entire Letters to the Hebrews, was written to Jewish Christians facing persecution and contemplating a return to Judaism. The early church suffered opposition from religious authorities, social ostracism, and, at times, state-sponsored persecution. Believers faced pressure to conform to societal norms, and some were even martyred for their faith. The same is true of us today as we face never-before-seen pressures to compromise on all fronts, especially for Christians who have gone into politics and public service. Here are a few lessons from the passage:

- **Faith in Action:** The faith demonstrated in these stories wasn't passive; it prompted action. Live out your faith actively in deeds that reflect your trust in God.

- **Victory Through Faith:** The victories achieved by these individuals were a result of their faith in God's promises. When we trust God and His guidance, we can overcome challenges and achieve remarkable things in this life.
- **Transformation and Deliverance:** Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets all experienced transformation and deliverance from dire circumstances through their faith. Your situation is not unique; God can change your condition no matter how long you have lived with it.
- **Perseverance in Trials:** The early church's experience with persecution parallels the challenges faced by believers today. Persevere in your faith, even when faced with severe opposition.
- **Faith's Impact on Families:** The mention of "women receiving their dead back from the dead" hints at the profound impact of faith not only on individuals but also on their families, thus underscoring the ripple effect of faith in a household.

## Conclusion

We see a vivid portrait of faith's triumphs and trials, illustrating how belief in God's promises transforms ordinary lives into extraordinary testimonies. From the conquest of cities to enduring persecution, the lives of these individuals showcase the diverse manifestations of faith and its profound impact on God's redemptive story. As we reflect on these narratives, may we be inspired by the timeless lessons of perseverance, courage, and unwavering trust in the face of adversity. Let us embrace a living faith that not only withstands the test of time but also leaves an enduring legacy of God's faithfulness for those coming after us.

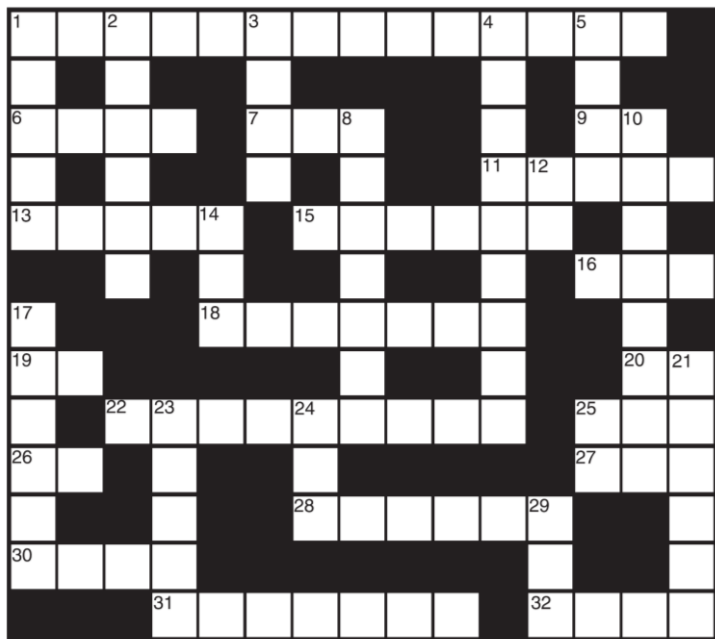
What will be said about your faith?

## Call to Action

- Reflect on the examples of faith-driven actions that you can find in Heb. 11:30–35a and consider how you can apply similar principles in your life.
- Exercise your faith to overcome challenges and trust God in difficult times while being a source of inspiration to your family and those around you.
- Pray for the strength and courage to act on your faith and trust in God's promises.

**Further Reading:** James 2:14-26; Matt. 17:20

## PROPHETS CROSSWORD PUZZLE



Directions: Use the clues and the scripture passages listed on [page 97](#) of this devotional to help you to complete the crossword puzzle.

## THE MARTYRS: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND SUFFERING

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### Hebrews 11:35b-39a

35 women received back their dead and were raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released so that they might gain a better resurrection.

Hebrews 11:35b–39 delves into the latter verses of the renowned “Hall of Faith,” offering a poignant exploration into the lives of those who, despite their resolute commitment to God, faced trials, persecution, and, in some cases, martyrdom. These verses paint a sobering yet inspiring picture of the sacrifices made by individuals whose faith transcended earthly circumstances, pointing towards a heavenly hope that outshines temporal challenges.

We can draw the following insights from the above passage as we glean lessons on faith from various individuals and their experiences:

- **Endurance and Perseverance in Suffering:** These verses describe the hardships and sufferings endured by people of faith, including persecution and martyrdom.

Stephen (Acts 7) was the first recorded martyr. He was stoned to death for testifying to the truth about Christ. Many more followers of the Way would later be imprisoned, have their property confiscated, and suffer all kinds of trials. In 155 AD, Polycarp, the 86-year-old bishop of the church in Smyrna, was burned at the stake for refusing to denounce Christ. When asked by the proconsul to do so, he said:

“For eighty and six years, I have been Christ’s servant, and he has done me no wrong. How can I now blaspheme my king, who saved me?”

- **Hope Beyond Earthly Outcomes:** Some of these individuals did not receive the earthly promises they hoped for. Our faith should not be solely based on temporal rewards but on the hope of eternal blessings in the presence of God. The focus on a heavenly reward reminds us to set our sights beyond earthly circumstances. This perspective will sustain us through trials and provide a greater purpose for our faith journey.
- **Identifying with Jesus' Suffering:** The early Christians identified with Christ's suffering. This is a challenge for us to see our sufferings in light of Christ's sacrifice.
- **The Importance of Testimony:** Even in their suffering and martyrdom, these individuals bore witness to their faith. It teaches us the significance of our testimony and how our lives can inspire others to turn to God, come out of an abusive relationship, or give up destructive behaviour. You never know who will come to Christ as a result of your testimony.
- **Commitment Amid Uncertainties:** The uncertainty faced by the early Christians resonates with the challenges we may encounter today: rising cost of living, double-figure high inflation rate, extra-judicial killings, election violence, poor infrastructure and amenities, which have resulted in the "Japa" syndrome that has led to people leaving the country in droves for greener pastures. Can our challenges today compare to theirs? The call is to remain committed to our faith even when the path ahead seems unclear or daunting.

## Conclusion

Hebrews 11:35–39a serves as an emotional epilogue to the "Hall of Faith." We have seen the lives of those who faced persecution, trials, and even martyrdom for their faith. Following Jesus will often involve endurance in the face of adversity. We

must focus on the heavenly reward rather than fleeting earthly gains. The sacrifices made by these heroes of faith echo through the corridors of time, challenging us to consider the depth of our commitment to God.

As we contemplate their stories, may we find inspiration in their resilience, recognising that a life of faith, though marked by trials, is ultimately defined by a hope that goes beyond this life and points towards an eternal reward in the embrace of our faithful Creator.

### Call to Action

- Reflect on the lives of those mentioned in Hebrews 11:35–39a and their steady faith in the face of suffering and persecution. How does their example challenge you to stand firm in your faith, even when faced with difficulties?
- Pray for strength and perseverance to endure trials and maintain your testimony of faith, trusting in the eternal reward promised by God.

**Further Reading:** 2 Tim 3:12; 1 Pet. 4:12–13

George Timothy, *Martyria: The Life and Death of f Polycarp*.  
Published on February 23, 2019

*"The tyrant dies and his rule is over, the martyr dies  
and his rule begins"*  
- Soren Kierkegaard

*"The martyr endured tortures to affirm his belief in  
truth but he never asserted his disbelief in torture"*  
- Gilbert K. Chesterton

*"A martyr is someone willing to die for what he  
believes in. A fanatic is someone willing for you to die  
for what he believes in"*  
- Marsha Hinds

## FAITH COMMENDED

Hebrews 11:13-16, 39-40

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**These** were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.

**T**oday we come to the end of our journey through the Hall of Faith. Being reminded of the faith lives of those who have gone before us is truly inspiring.

In today's religious world, we often tend to view faith as something you must have to claim huge material benefits from God. While it is not wrong to believe in God for a new car or a financial breakthrough, Hebrews 11 has taught us that faith is a lot deeper than that.

Scripture tells us that the heroes of faith did not even receive what they believed God for. They were still living by faith when they died. Yet God commended them! To God, what matters is not so much whether we receive the promise as whether our faith will remain intact and unshaken till the very end. Faith continues beyond this life. (1 Cor 13:13)

When you do not yet receive what you are hoping for, do you give up on God's promise? Do you begin to doubt your relationship with him?

Another thing that stood out in these great believers of old was their heavenly perspective. They admitted that they were "aliens and strangers" on Earth. While the rest of the world was consumed with the here and now, these uncommon men and women were consumed with their heavenly destination. I believe this is what helped them hold on to faith despite whatever circumstances they faced. Our faith will only be as big as our view of God.

Do you think about heaven? Not in a resigned manner as those who are forced to admit that death is inevitable, but rather as an active hope, a future joy, the place and time when every ...

longing will be fulfilled. Let us look forward to our “better country,” which God himself is panelling for us, and let us keep our eyes of faith there.

## **Conclusion**

Like the heroes before us, may we receive God's “thumbs up” for a faith that never gives up.

## **Call to Action**

You have read the stories of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and more. Now it's time to write yours! By faith, take a pen and paper and include your personal story in the hall of faith. Sounds funny? Give it a try! Write or record how you want your life to become a faith inspiration for others in the future. Pray about it and share it with trusted friends. Watch your faith grow as a result.

**Further Reading:** Luke 7:9; Luke 18:7-8





# JESUS: Lord of the Unshakable Kingdom

Chapter 12



[Hebrews Chapter 12](#)

### **Hebrews 12:22-24**

*22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*  
NIV

### **JESUS: Lord of the Unshakable Kingdom**

**Day 29** – Stay focused on the goal

**Day 30** – Discipline – A mark of God's love

**Day 31** – Discipline – The path to a great harvest.

**Day 32** – At Peace with Everyone –  
Relationships within and outside the church

**Day 33** – This Birthright is not for Sale –  
Godliness and the exercise of Restraint

**Day 34** – A Kingdom of Joy

**Day 35** – A Kingdom of Reverence and Awe

## STAY FOCUSED ON THE GOAL

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## Heb 12:1-3

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.*

*L*et's begin this day's devotional with a little humour:

"Consider the postage stamp; its usefulness consists in its ability to stick to one thing till it gets there!" (Josh Billings).

Having seen the incredible example of the cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 11, what can we learn about staying focused and "sticking to" the ultimate goal of our faith?

Luciano Pavarotti, the world-famous opera singer, tells how, as a boy, his father introduced him to the wonders of song. "He urged me to work very hard to develop my voice. A professional tenor in my hometown of Modena, Italy, took me as a pupil. I also enrolled in a Teacher's College. On graduating, I asked my father, 'Shall I be a teacher and a singer?' 'Luciano,' he replied, 'if you try to sit on two chairs, you will fall between them. For life, you must choose one chair.' I chose one. It took seven years of study and frustration before I made my first professional appearance. It took another seven to reach the Metropolitan Opera. And now I think, whether it's laying bricks or writing a book—whatever we choose—we should give ourselves to it. Commitment—that's the key. Choose one chair."

As disciples of Christ, we are sometimes suspicious and confused about choosing one chair! Is that even possible? We may ask, as though God requires us to be diluted in our focus and distracted by the many interests that our ever-changing world exposes us to. But the Apostle Paul was single-minded in his devotion: "One thing I do," he wrote to his friends in Philippi, "I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:17-4:1.)

We must keep our focus on Jesus. He warned that “no one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9.62).

Many leadership books tell how Hernán Cortés began his conquest of the Aztec Empire and the colonisation of the Americas for Spain. After landing at Vera Cruz in 1519 with a small force of seven hundred men, legend has it that he set fire to most of the fleet of eleven ships. As the men watched their only means of retreat sink to the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico, they realised there was now only one direction to move—forward into the Mexican interior to conquer whatever might come their way. They were prevented from turning back by Cortés' decisive cutting off of any way of escape.

Many distractions threaten to steal our focus and turn us back from the goal to which we have been called. Fears, busyness, other interests, disappointments, career pursuits, conflicts, and the like. Not everything that divides our interests is bad. But, like Cortés, how do we burn our fleet of distractions so that we give undivided devotion to the Lord?

## **Conclusion**

We are being reminded today that we must lay aside everything that hinders us and run the race that has been marked out for us. Jesus is our great example. He went to the cross, stayed on the cross, and died on the cross for our redemption. What is your response today?

## **Call to Action**

Ask yourself, “What was my goal when I became a disciple of Jesus?” Write down the three biggest distractions that are weighing you down in this race and what you will do to overcome them. Put these before God in prayer.

**Further Reading:** Phil 3:12-14

## DISCIPLINE: A MARK OF GOD'S LOVE

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### Heb 12:4–10 (Part 1)

*Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), you are illegitimate children and not true sons.*

*W*henever I hear the word discipline, all I think about is "punishment." As a child, my father did not take indiscipline lightly. Many times, he would use the rod. I certainly did not feel loved when measures like that were taken, especially as this was always his first and only choice to discipline. On the other hand, my mother was soft-spoken. She would talk it through, carefully selecting her words. Sometimes, her words cut like a knife, and that caused me to think deeply. I must confess that I didn't like that either! I tried to understand why they had to inflict pain or say something hurtful. Believe me, at those times, I felt like an illegitimate child of my parents.

*Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them for it. They disciplined us for a little while, as they thought best.*

It took me time to understand that this discipline was actually love. It was certainly not a 'feel-good' love that came with pet talks or family gatherings where everyone rubbed minds or shared opinions. It was hard love that instilled discipline. God intentionally uses the example of our human parents because, imperfect as they might be, their authority in our lives begins to teach us about our relationship with our heavenly parent. Nevertheless, despite their best efforts, the correction we received from them was often far from ideal. Earthly parents do not always succeed in their endeavour to train their children wisely and correct them in a manner they think is most fitting.

As fully grown adults, however, we have come to understand that our parents' actions were borne out of love to produce in us children obedience, diligence, a hard work ethic, kindness,

and/or other character-forming attributes. Some of us have grown to become parents or guardians ourselves, and we now also bear the responsibility of disciplining our children and wards. This should deepen our appreciation for what our parents went through to discipline us. We have since learned that it is as difficult to bestow discipline as it is to receive it.

**Conclusion:**

We must look back on the discipline that we received from our parents with fresh appreciation. Consider what good character traits are in you today as a result of the discipline instilled in you by your parents.

**Call to Action:**

If your parents are still living, find a way to thank them for their discipline and love.  
If you are a parent or guardian, get help concerning any challenges that you may be facing as you discipline your children or wards.

**Further Reading:** Proverbs 9:9, Luke 6:40

Hebrews 11

F	K	C	T	T	H	R	E	E	N	X	B	Q	T	X	E	L
E	D	R	C	S	M	O	D	G	N	I	K	A	R	R	E	M
C	E	H	A	Q	E	W	I	E	N	W	F	N	H	H	N	Y
I	T	S	H	T	N	O	M	H	S	O	D	A	I	A	H	B
F	S	W	D	E	U	D	B	U	S	R	E	C	D	A	R	X
I	E	D	I	V	A	D	S	P	K	M	A	D	O	G	C	T
R	T	F	P	Y	H	A	O	R	A	H	P	H	E	K	E	L
C	H	S	T	E	H	P	O	R	P	C	C	M	A	G	C	D
A	P	S	A	J	S	L	T	C	M	I	Z	R	B	C	N	A
S	E	E	H	E	A	R	M	S	R	F	A	J	E	O	A	U
F	S	I	C	P	R	W	S	E	A	B	E	G	L	N	T	G
G	O	P	O	H	A	V	J	L	C	S	K	N	H	C	I	H
M	J	S	N	T	I	B	L	D	A	H	A	T	W	E	R	T
Z	O	U	E	A	O	B	I	M	Z	H	I	A	Y	I	E	E
D	K	S	B	H	E	H	U	M	A	A	L	L	A	V	H	R
I	U	S	E	E	L	E	T	O	F	L	T	L	D	E	N	R
R	I	E	Y	S	L	K	N	O	S	M	A	S	R	D	I	U

prophets  
gedeon  
walls  
three  
ark  
noah

samuel  
kingdoms  
Jericho  
hid  
sacrifice  
enoch

david  
subdued  
moses  
tested  
abel  
faith

jephtahe  
rahab  
daughter  
child  
cain

samson  
spies  
pharoah  
conceived  
joseph

barak  
fall  
months  
inheritance  
sarai

## DISCIPLINE: A PATH TO HARVEST

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### Hebrews 12:10–13

*No discipline seems pleasant at the time but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*

Yesterday, we read how our parents disciplined us for a little while, as they thought best. We saw how they did this, for the sake of love. Let us think about this as we consider our heavenly Father, who disciplines us to secure our salvation. Indeed, *"The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."* We are convinced that God's discipline is perfect. Heb. 12:10–11 highlights two of the most important benefits of God's discipline:

- God disciplines us for our good so that we can share in His holiness.
- God's discipline produces a harvest of righteousness and peace.

God's discipline brings a spiritual harvest, secures our eternity, and results in greater honour and glory for Him. We learn to live righteously by submitting ourselves to doing the things of the Spirit.

We can learn a few lessons from nature here. Fruit cannot be manufactured in a factory. We all know that fruit must be grown. However, even plants that are grown under ideal conditions with soil, air, and sunlight still need the wise touch of 'discipline' that will boost their fruitfulness. Pruning, framing, or trellising will keep the plant straight and make it even more fruitful. In the same way, God has sprinkled defining moments of discipline in my life to mature me to greater fruitfulness.

The most defining period in my Christian life happened when I had to undergo church discipline because of the sin in my life. It was not easy being asked to stay away from church. I was resentful and angry at God and at the church leaders. This went on until a friend spoke to me and helped me see that God was disciplining me for my good. I drew a lot of strength and encouragement from Deut. 31:6 and held on to God's promise that He is always with me. I repented, and I came to understand that discipline must grow through obedience.

Should we not love and respect him who sent his Son to die for us all on Calvary's cross? How unwise we are when we resent his correction! The Lord disciplines those he loves, just as an earthly father admonishes the son in whom he delights.

## **Conclusion**

We must embrace God's chastening rod and recognise the need to be under his justified jurisdiction as we submit ourselves to his leading and guidance. Remember that we are children of light who have been saved from the slave market of sin and adopted into the family of God.

## **Call to Action**

In what areas do you need to imbibe discipline in your life? Food? Negative thoughts? Laziness? Anger? Sexual purity? Procrastination? The list goes on. Identify one or two. Pray and pick out someone who you know can help you toughen up in these areas.

Knowing that his discipline is for your good, be willing and ready to receive correction from God's Word.

## **Further Reading:**

Proverbs 13:18, Proverbs 11:14, and Proverbs 18:15.



## At Peace with Everyone: Relationships within and outside the church

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### Hebrews 12:14–15

*Make every effort to live at peace with everyone and to be holy.*

Is it possible to be at peace with all men? If the word of God says “make every effort,” it’s a clear indication that it requires “work.” We have to be deliberate about living at peace with all men.

**Peace with all men.** Since this is God’s design, it ought to be the design and concern of us, His children. With renewed strength and patience, may we pursue peace with all men. As Christians, though in the world but not of the world, we cannot allow the chaos emanating from economic insecurity, scarcity, inflation, health challenges, and uncertainties in this world to rob us of the peace that only Christ can give. This peace is freely given to us because of the privilege of being born again.

**Holiness is the second nature of a Christian.** Because we desire to see God, holiness should be our spiritual garment. The Bible clearly tells us that without holiness, no man can see God. We can attain this holiness by constantly checking on ourselves and others around us. We must also keep on making every effort to rid ourselves of any sin that might contaminate us and keep on imitating Christ in everything we do, say, and think. We must make sure to expose any sin that entangles us by confessing our struggles.

In my life, every effort involved dealing with my intense anger issues. God used my former discipling partner (of blessed memory) to caution and counsel me to the needed mind change and determination to overcome this sin in my life. You can overcome too!

**God's grace** cannot be taken for granted. Let's not deliberately grieve the Holy Spirit we received at the point of baptism. Because of God's grace, deliberate sin cannot be encouraged in our lives as Christians. Let's heed the Bible's encouragement that we should "see to it that no one falls short of the grace of God."

**Bitter roots** should have no place in our hearts. As ambassadors of Christ, there should be no room for bitterness. A heart that is filled with bitterness will most likely be bitter towards everything and everyone around it. This only produces division and disunity amongst us, which then allows evil to have its way in the household of God. Bitterness is infectious and toxic, easily spreading from one person to another. Do not be surprised that entire congregations can be infected with bitterness. This is certainly *not* the will of God for His people. Whatever the grievance, we should learn to talk about it, forgive one another, and let go, thereby freeing ourselves of the burden of bitterness in our hearts.

## **Conclusion**

Yes, we can live at peace with all men and expunge all bitter roots from our hearts! We can succeed in this if only we rely on God's words and precepts while always fighting to be righteous. We must fear and revere God and run from sins because all sins easily entangle us. This will make it a lot easier to attain holiness.

## **Call to Action**

- Always have a quality Bible study.
- Run from sin.
- Confess every sin or struggle.
- Forgive always

## Prayer

Heavenly Father, the all-seeing and all-knowing, is our merciful king. We are not worthy to come before your throne of grace, but in your mercy, you have made it possible. Forgive us all our transgressions and grant us the ability to always allow your guidance. Help us to reverence you in our daily lives, and help us not to take your grace for granted. Teach us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling to attain the ultimate goal of being with you when our time in this life is up. For this and many more blessings, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Further Reading:** Philippians: 2: 12–13; Ephesians 4:31–32

### CLUES TO PUZZLES ON PAGE 81

#### Across

1. Babylonian king who conquered Jerusalem (Jer. 52:4-11)

6. In Hosea 9:1, the harvest feast in honor of Baal is called a "harlot's

7. How the lamb who represents God's suffering servant arrives at the slaughter (Is 53:7)

9. Breakfast drink abbreviation

11. The minor prophet who compares his relationship to his unfaithful wife with that of God and Israel

13. The minor prophet spoken of by Jeremiah in Jeremiah 26:18

15. The major prophet who wrote about the suffering servant before, during, and after the exile

16. Abbreviation for the major prophet imprisoned in the mud at the bottom of a cistern

18. This minor prophet wrote about 460 B.C.E. and insisted that Elijah would return before the Day of the Lord

19. Latin abbreviation for "Anno Domini" (In the year of the Lord)

20. Latin abbreviation for "that is"

22. The minor prophet who predicted the Messiah's entry into Jerusalem riding on an ass (same as 4 down)

25. Abbreviation for the minor prophet whose name in Hebrew means "my messenger"

26. What the Israelites are told to do in Babylon (Is 48:20)

27. Feminine pronoun for the God who has mothering qualities (Is 49:15)

28. What Ezekiel had to eat before he could begin prophesying (Ez. 3:1)

30. God will scatter the inhabitants of Jerusalem like chaff because they have trusted in this, says Jeremiah 13:25

31. The first prophet to receive his call outside of Israel, this

major prophet described the four cherubim before the throne of God

32. The name for Jerusalem when it is considered the dwelling place of the Lord

#### Down

1. The opening line of this minor prophet stated that his preaching would be about the fall of Nineveh

2. Jeremiah's private scribe (Jer. 36:8-10)

3. What the Lord God is to me, according to Isaiah 50:7

4. This minor prophet preached during the reign of King Josiah, two of his three chapters dealt with the Day of the Lord to come (also 22 across)

5. This minor prophet was a shepherd from Tekoa in Judah, but preached in the Northern Kingdom

8. What idolatry brings, according to the prophets (see Jer 15:9)

10. This major prophet was told by the Lord to remain unmarried

12. An exclamation, as in Jeremiah 8:23

14. Noah's son, supposed ancestor of the Canaanites (Gen 9:22)

17. The first minor prophet after the exile ended; he encouraged the people who returned from Babylon to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem

21. The number of minor prophets

23. If the Exodus was the central event of the Torah, what was the central event of the prophetic books of the Bible?

24. One of only two talking animals in the Bible (Nm 22:21-35)

25. Abbreviation for manuscript

29. The former name of the shrine of Bethel (Gen 28:19)

### Hebrews 12:16–17

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*... that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. – ESV*

**I**n today's lesson, we shall be looking at the story of Esau, the mistake he made in giving up his birthright for a single meal, and the essence of godliness and the virtue of restraint in today's self-indulgent world.

In the prevailing economic downtime and hardship, we are faced with the daily pressure to make decisions in so many areas of life—careers, relationships, business dealings, and so on. “Where should I go to school?” “What kind of job should I accept?” “Who should I decide to marry?” “What business should I venture into?” Do you make decisions based on what you want now or on what you need in the long run? You must always evaluate the long-range effects of your decisions and actions.

Like many of us, Esau was caught in a bad place and needed to decide. At that time, he was hungry and needed food, and he was not too concerned about the consequences of selling his birthright to his brother. For him, it was about the immediate satisfaction and gratification of his needs and desires. His future inheritance was of little value to him at that moment!

As disciples of Jesus, we have been redeemed of our past way of life and brought into a glorious inheritance in Christ Jesus, our Lord, who purchased us through his death, burial, and resurrection in power and mighty strength (Eph 1:18–23).

In Col 1:10–14, we are reminded that we have a share in the heavenly inheritance with God's holy people in His kingdom. Therefore, we are urged to live a life worthy of the Lord and to please him in every way. We have been chosen and marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, which is a guarantee of our inheritance in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:11–14). Wow! What a great

privilege we enjoy as disciples of Christ!! However, we can lose all of this in a moment of recklessness and carefree decisions and actions. Sin is our greatest enemy, so we must protect and defend our birthright by staying away from anything that contaminates our body and spirit. Nothing is worth more than your soul and your eternal inheritance in heaven with God.

The temptations that we face daily are real. The challenges of life and the quest to make ends meet are hurdles we must face. Esau had to face that same challenge too. To him, it made no sense to think about what the future consequences of his decision and action would be when all he needed was food here and now. How are you like this in your daily life? Does it matter to you what the outcome and consequences of your actions or inaction will be? To what extent are you willing to protect and defend your salvation?

## **Conclusion**

The world offers us many options to satisfy our desires and cravings, but they may not be the very best for us in the long run. We must be determined to stay focused on pursuing righteousness and always seeking out the will of God.

## **Call to Action**

What major decisions are before you now? Ask yourself, "What will Jesus do?"

Pray and fast to take steps that will glorify God in the action you want to take today.

**Further Reading** Gen 13 and 19 (Lot's choice): 59:1-2; and Gal 5:19-21 (Sin our enemy)

#### Hebrews 12:18–24

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*But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God,  
to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to  
the church of the firstborn...*

**T**he scenario described in Hebrews 12:18–21 is overwhelming.

The Hebrew writer was referring to the account of Israel in the wilderness in Exodus 19:16–19. I encourage you to take time to read these verses thoughtfully. Imagine yourself, for a moment, standing among the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai, seeing the dense cloud and fearsome lightning and hearing the terrible thunder! This was what it meant to come to God! Over and over again, God had to remind Moses to tell the people not to come close; otherwise, they would die. (Exodus 19:12, 21–22) If this was what we had to experience every time we tried to come near God, how could we stand it? Even though the Israelites had Moses to intercede for them, they could never approach God so directly. Moses himself trembled with fear!

It is good for us to consider this when we read verses 22–24 of Hebrews 12, and we realise that we have the best intercessor in Jesus Christ. When you look at the above, we are given yet another reminder of all that Jesus has won for us and saved us from. The Israelites were at Mount Sinai; we have come to Mount Zion. We have come to a heavenly city of God that is neither limited by geographic boundaries nor visible to human eyes. Ours is a community of worshippers of God made of the angels and the spirits of the righteous ones who have gone ahead, all joined together with us to form a joyful, *not fearful*, assembly before our glorious God. Joy is ours in the kingdom of God. While we cannot physically see these heavenly things, we believe in these amazing blessings by faith.

We can also relate because of our church community here on earth, which is another reminder that these things are true. The passage refers to us as the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. I don't know about you, but I don't think about this as often as I should.

Jesus is the firstborn, and we are his brothers and sisters, whose places are secure and whose names are written down. WOW! This should make us even more determined not to throw away this grace but to nurture it by investing in our relationship with God and our personal growth and service.

I am also guilty of often taking the joy of the kingdom for granted. We must repent when we take for granted the fact that we are known and loved and that, in everything we go through, we are not alone because people care enough to pray for us. Let us remember that we do not need to grieve, struggle, or even celebrate alone because we have a wonderful kingdom family with whom we can share our joys and sorrows. Without a doubt, the church is not perfect, and I too have nursed hurt feelings over issues. However, the constant guidance from the Bible, the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and the good counsel of other disciples have restored my joy time and again. Nothing is sweeter than the joy of restored and righteous relationships. As a matter of fact, I have many homes in many cities. For wherever disciples are gathered, we can find families of believers who can connect us with us and make us feel at home.

## **Conclusion**

Through Jesus, we have the privilege to approach God with joy, not dread. We are part of a great universal fellowship of the saints, and we must deeply cherish the kingdom family to which we belong. No matter where you are in the present moment, your joy too can be restored.

## **Call to Action**

Confess anything that has been holding back your joy. Take responsibility to change your perspective where necessary, and do not let circumstances steal your joy.

**Further Reading:** Psalm 30:11, Nehemiah 8:10

## Hebrews 12:25–29

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*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.*

**A**s recipients of a heavenly kingdom through a better mediator, a careful reading of **Hebrews 12:25–29** provides a summary for us of what our response ought to be. Yesterday, we were reminded that we have the privilege of participating in the joyful assembly of the kingdom of God. Today, we will see how to go deeper into our kingdom experience through reverence and awe. We are warned not to refuse him, “who warns us from heaven.” Let us consider what this means.

First, we must be reflective and thoughtful enough to remain aware of the value of what we are receiving. Verse 28 of Hebrews 12 reminds us that this is a kingdom “*that cannot be shaken*”! That is huge! In this world of uncertainty and challenges, we can be assured that our kingdom’s inheritance is secure in spite of the economic and political upheaval of our times. This promise also gives us assurance through the difficult seasons of our lives. You may be reading this and you are battling ill-health, grieving the passing of loved ones, or perhaps enduring the pain of difficult (or even failed) relationships. It may be that you are battling financially or in other ways. Our hearts go out to one another as we struggle. I ask you to please reflect on the fact that your kingdom’s inheritance **cannot** be shaken! Nothing and no one can take that away from you. Take heart!

“And let us be thankful,” the Hebrew writer continues. Gratitude also requires presence of mind and calm reflection. There are many times when the busyness, pressures, and discomforts of the moment send my gratitude flying out the window. At those times, I find myself grumbling, complaining, and irritable. I am pretty sure that I am not alone in this! We need to repent. We are reminded that ours is such a great blessing that we cannot allow the problems of life to rob us of our gratitude, no matter whether the problems are intense or mundane.



Finally, we are cautioned to “*worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.*” You will agree with me that we can only revere God acceptably when our hearts are in a place of faithfulness and gratitude. Only then will our prayers and songs to God be meaningful—and not just religious noise or clichés. When we worship corporately as a church, God is more interested in the state of our hearts as individuals than in our ‘sonorous’ voices or modern musical instruments. Mindfully work on your heart every day, so that when you stand in worship, your sacrifice will be pleasing to God. However, corporate worship is just one aspect. We must also *make* the time to draw near to God in private worship. Remember, too, that your acts of kindness and generosity to the poor or those in need are also acts of worship that please God, especially when they are carried out quietly in humility.

The Hebrew writer concludes this section by reminding us that “*our God is a consuming fire.*” This is a frightening description to remind us that we cannot take God for granted. He has indeed made a better way for us to know Him and given us access to the Most Holy Place through Jesus Christ. He has forgiven our sins and accepts our worship of thanks and praise, but we *cannot* take Him for granted. We *must not* ignore or trivialise this great salvation!

## **Conclusion**

Our response to the great salvation and the unshakable inheritance we have received should be one of gratitude and a life of sincere and reverent worship. May we never take our God for granted!

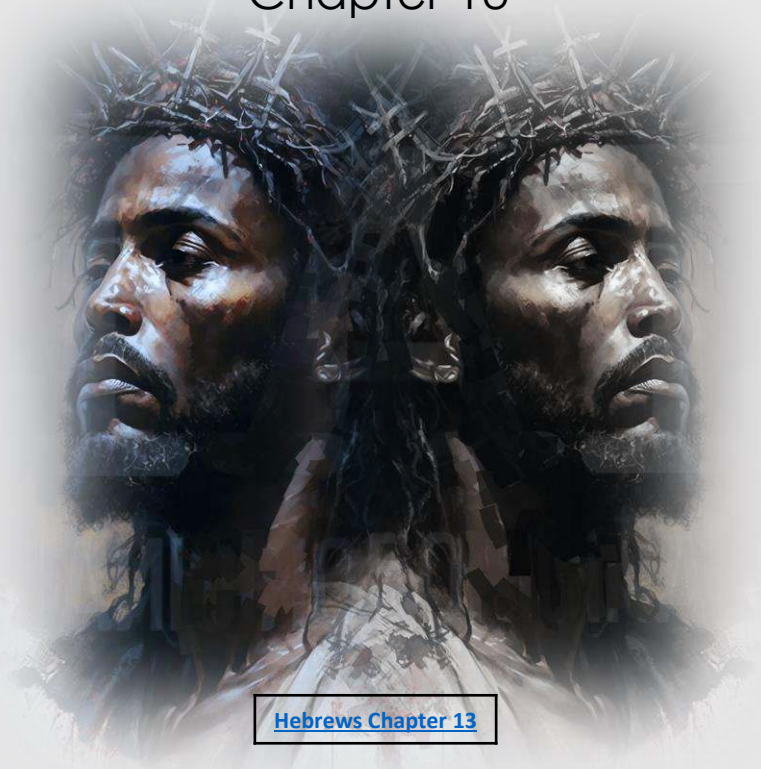
## **Call to Action**

Examine yourself today. How faithful and grateful are you? In what ways do you need to work on your heart for your worship to be acceptable? What habits must you imbibe to grow in your worship experience?

**Further Reading:** John 16:33, Matthew 6:2–3.

# JESUS: The Same Yesterday, Today and Forever

Chapter 13



[Hebrews Chapter 13](#)

**Heb 13:12-14**

*12 And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.*

*13 Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.*

*NIV*

**JESUS: The Same Yesterday, Today and Forever.**

**Day 36** – Keep on Loving: Hospitality & Empathy

**Day 37** – Pure in God's Eyes:

Sexual Integrity for Marrieds and non-Marrieds

**Day 38** – The Spirit of Contentment

**Day 39** – Remember your Leaders.

**Day 40** – Do not be carried away-

Distinguishing false teachings from true

**Day 41** – Pleasing Sacrifices

**Day 42** – The City that is to Come – Heaven in view

**Day 42** – EPILOGUE

## KEEP ON LOVING: HOSPITALITY AND EMPATHY

### Hebrews 13 V 1-3

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*Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers. Remember those in prison.*

The final chapter of Hebrews gives us a lot of practical direction for our daily lives as New Testament followers of Jesus Christ. The very first of these is the call to love one another and to be people of empathy and hospitality.

This direct command resonates with me and reminds me of what happened several years ago when I had to travel from Lagos to Port Harcourt for a business event. Before my journey, one of my young business associates, whom I didn't know too well, invited me to stay at her place. Although I had already arranged to stay in a hotel, I accepted her invitation so that I would have the opportunity to interact with her.

Her place was a small but clean, one-room, self-contained apartment. She made a simple meal, and we had a good discussion and slept. The next day, I travelled back to Lagos.

This account was a perfect example of the hospitality shown to me by this young lady. I was encouraged and convicted at the time, but it was only recently that I identified why.

I was convicted because if I had been in her situation, I may not have invited someone I didn't know well to stay in my small apartment, as I would have felt that it was inadequate and that it would be too small to accommodate an unfamiliar person. I enjoyed the time and highly appreciated her gesture, and memories of how I felt have stayed with me till today.

Hospitality is about welcoming and caring for strangers and guests in a way that reflects God's love and generosity. It is about warmth, kindness, and a genuine desire to make others feel at ease. It is not about a perfect house or perfect food, but about showing love to people around us without expecting a reward. We are commanded by God to be hospitable.

It's not a suggestion or an option. The Bible says we should welcome strangers. These may also mean people we don't know well or who are not in our regular circle.

There are many ways to show hospitality in obedience to God. Inviting someone over for a simple meal or snack, asking someone about their day and sitting down to listen to them, sending an encouraging message to someone you haven't seen in a while, inviting someone to stay in your house even at your inconvenience, and many more.

**This** passage also says we should visit people in prison. This can be an actual prison or people who are mistreated or incarcerated physically or emotionally in one way or another. The goal is to put ourselves in people's shoes, feel with them, show empathy and love, and meet their needs.

Have you been hospitable to others? When was the last time you invited someone who is not necessarily in your "circle of friends" over just to encourage and not for a party? If you had been in the position of that young lady, would you have invited me, who you didn't know well, to stay with you in a small apartment just to show care and concern?

How about visiting someone in prison? Regardless of how or why the person got into prison or that prison-like situation, we are commanded to visit and show empathy. For inmates in actual prison facilities, we could go in groups (bible talks or family groups) to encourage and strengthen them.

## **Conclusion**

Hospitality and empathy are some of the practical ways that we show ourselves to be Jesus' disciples. Let us remember that whatever we do in obedience to these instructions, we do for Jesus Himself.

## Call to Action

1. Pray and ask God to show you how you can grow in the area of hospitality. How can you show love to people who are in a state of “prison”? Write down your specific thoughts.

2. Decide to carry out one act of hospitality for someone as a first step towards making it a lifestyle. Ask someone to hold you accountable.

### Further Reading:

Matthew 25:34–40

Luke 14:12–14

TO PRISON  
AS IN  
IF LOVE THOSE  
YOU  
AND  
HOSPITALITY  
WERE

SOME SUFFERING  
STRANGERS YOURSELVES  
CONTINUE  
ANGELS  
BROTHERS THEM  
WITH  
BY IT  
SHOWN  
DOING SO ONE LOVING ON  
PEOPLE NOT ANOTHER  
WITHOUT FOR SHOW  
TOGETHER KNOWING  
ARE  
DO HAVE MISTREATED  
FORGET WHO  
KEEP  
SISTERS  
REMEMBER

## PURE IN GOD'S EYES: SEXUAL PURITY AS A CHRISTIAN

### Hebrews 13:4

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*Marriage should be honoured by all and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.*

**A**t first glance, it may appear that this well-known verse is directed only to married people, but a careful reading quickly reveals that it gives an injunction of sexual purity to all Christians, both married and unmarried. This is because sexual sin is of such a sensitive nature that it has repercussions on many levels. “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?” (1 Cor. 6:15) and “You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honour God with your body.” (1 Cor. 6:19b-20). Please go through this entire devotional thoughtfully, whether you are married or unmarried.

### A Word to the Unmarried

The task of keeping the marriage bed pure begins long before marriage. Sexual impurity and sexual sin committed by a single person create an accumulation of unwanted relational and emotional baggage that you will drag into any future marriage that you will contract. Feelings of guilt and unwanted memories can create a wedge of emotional distance between you and your future spouse. Many single people are under the false assumption that marriage is a cure for sexual impurity. Nothing could be further from the truth. Coming into the light now, by confessing lust and any other sexual temptation, is a lifeline to overcoming sexual impurity.

Brothers and sisters, let us do our best to keep our minds pure by avoiding sexually suggestive media or literature. You must have convictions that pornography is a “no-go area”! Pornography degrades the mind and soils the conscience. Take radical steps to confess your struggles and sins in this area, and stay far away from pornographic material. Likewise, masturbation is fueled by lust, which drives one into selfishly expressed sexual desire.

If not repented of, the repercussions of sexual sin will follow you into your marriage to destroy it. Your singlehood is a blessing and a great opportunity to build or rebuild the right spiritual and sexual foundations for a great future.

### **A Word to the Married**

The task of remaining sexually pure is an ongoing challenge, even after marriage. Every admonition that applies to the unmarried continues to apply to marriage. Married individuals must be mindful not to throw caution to the wind but to be extremely careful to keep the marriage bed pure. Each spouse must remain in the light. Secrecy is a recipe for disaster.

For the avoidance of doubt, pornography is not okay in marriage either. It is a perversion that will destroy your mind. Similarly, masturbation perverts the goal of a selfless marital sexual union. It will degrade you and distance you from your spouse. It is appropriate in many cases to confess sexual sins or struggles to your spouse so that you can "have each other's backs" and work through the issues as a team. Connect with mature Christians or older married couples who have the wisdom to provide accountability, advice, and guidance. Cultivate your marriage like a well-watered garden and enjoy its fruit together.

### **Call to Action:**

- Come into the light by confessing sexual sins and struggles.
- Be radical in staying away from **individuals, materials, or situations** that lead you into temptation.

**Further Reading:** 1 Cor. 6:13–20



### Hebrews 13:5-6

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*"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have."*

The message of Hebrews 13:5 is in stark contrast to a world that constantly encourages us to want more.

In today's world, we are constantly bombarded with prompts about wealth. "You need to be at the top" is the covert message in movies and advertisements. Even in churches, the slogan "My God is not poor" is the order of the day. In truth, our God is not poor, and He gives according to His will. The scriptures, however, say, "There will always be the poor among you." Contradictory, right? Probably, but it isn't. It simply means that whatever you have, little or plenty, be content with it and know you have a rich God who knows what you are capable of handling at a given time.

Lack of contentment is like being in a slow lane in traffic; when you decide to change lanes, the lane you left suddenly starts moving faster. It is all a matter of perspective.

Don't get me wrong, contentment isn't complacency or settling for less. Instead, it is a deep sense of gratitude and satisfaction in all circumstances, knowing that God is in control. Philippians 4:11-13 reminds us that contentment comes from relying on Christ's strength. We should seek contentment in our relationships, possessions, and achievements, understanding that true fulfilment comes from God alone.

When you pray to God for prosperity, what exactly is the motive behind it? Is it about being as rich as your neighbour or brother, or even being wealthier than them? Or is it about being able to do more for the needy? The story of the slave girl and Naaman captures the best attitude towards people who are better positioned than us. While serving as a slave, she showed compassion towards her master's leprous condition and proffered a solution (2 Kings 5:3).

Comparison is the thief of contentment. In a social media-driven world, it is easy to fall into the trap of comparing ourselves to others. *2 Corinthians 10:12* reminds us that comparing ourselves to others isn't wise. Instead, let's seek to appreciate and celebrate the unique gifts and talents God has given each of us, recognising that our worth is found in Christ, not in worldly treasures.

God says, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." This is a promise that, in every situation, God is with us. He doesn't abandon us when times are tough or when we fail. His presence is constant and unchanging. – Wow!

The key to contentment lies in understanding and embracing this promise. We can navigate life without the fear of lack or the relentless pursuit of more because we know that, in God, we have everything we need—*Matthew 6:33* attests to this.

## Conclusion

The spirit of contentment is a precious gift from God. As we cultivate gratitude, guard against comparison, and seek God's will, we can experience a deep sense of **peace** and joy that surpasses all understanding. Let's commit ourselves to a life of contentment and trust in God.

## Prayer

Dear Lord, help us to keep our lives free from the love of money and to be content with what we have. Please, God, bless me and my family and my brothers and sisters; we don't want to be too poor so we won't be tempted to steal, cheat, or lie, and neither do we want to be too rich so we won't be proud and forget you. Help us to be content in our situation. Thank you for answering our prayers. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

## Call to Action

Take time each day to reflect on God's goodness. ***Psalm 103:2*** encourages us to "forget not all his benefits." By focusing on the blessings, we have rather than what we lack, we can cultivate a spirit of contentment and joy.


**Further Reading:** *1 Tim 6:6–10*

Heb 13:7, 17-18

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*Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.*

"Everything rises and falls on leadership," says John Maxwell.

 Many people do not believe this saying, but we can see the truth of this statement throughout the Bible. God always seeks out first and foremost leadership amongst his people before undertaking any battle, all through the scriptures. Jesus began his ministry by calling some to be his apostles (Luke 6:13).

### **Consider the outcome of their Lives.**

God can do whatever he wants to do to accomplish his purpose on earth, but when we look at the scriptures, we see that God always used leaders to fulfil those purposes. Not because the leader was anything great, but because God is great, and he shows his greatness by using flawed humans to accomplish great things. Leaders are imperfect and human.

Moses was a reluctant and insecure leader, if there ever was one.

David, the youngest of Jesse's sons, is immature and impulsive. Joseph was cocky, conceited, and became a slave and prisoner.

The Apostles were ordinary and often faithless, fearful, and confused; God used them all in powerful ways!

Paul was a persecutor of Christians used by God to spread the gospel like no other missionary ever.

I am sure you can and will see the flaws in your present leaders. God used all these flawed men to lead His people in godly ways. Read the Book of Judges to find out what happened when there were no leaders in Israel (Judges 2:19; 21:25). Everyone did as they saw fit, and they suffered greatly.

So, leadership is essential, and we must follow the leaders that God has placed in our lives, not because men are necessarily anything great, but because the God whom they serve is great. The author of Hebrews recognises how important it is for God's people to follow the leaders that God has placed in their lives, so much so that he makes this the final point of his letter so that it will be fresh with them.

## **Obey Your Leaders**

Scripture does not give leaders in the church authority to make you do whatever they say. Peter even writes to the elders, telling them how they need to lead. 1 Peter 5:1–3

In the passage in Hebrews, the Greek word translated "obey" (peithoo, NT:3982) means that you do something because you are persuaded that you should follow. This does not mean, however, that you must be persuaded over every single thing or minute detail. It means that you need to be persuaded that the leaders of the church have been called and are seeking to follow God. Our attitude should be submissive in reverence for Christ.

## **Pray for your leaders.**

Being a leader in the church is a huge responsibility. Leaders have been charged with keeping watch over your souls. A leader's job is to lead in such a way that people will have an easier time following, even if it isn't always easy. You must lead with humility, gentleness, and love. God will judge the harsh, insensitive, and brutal leader of his people (Ezekiel 34:1–10). Therefore, we need to keep our leaders in our prayers always.

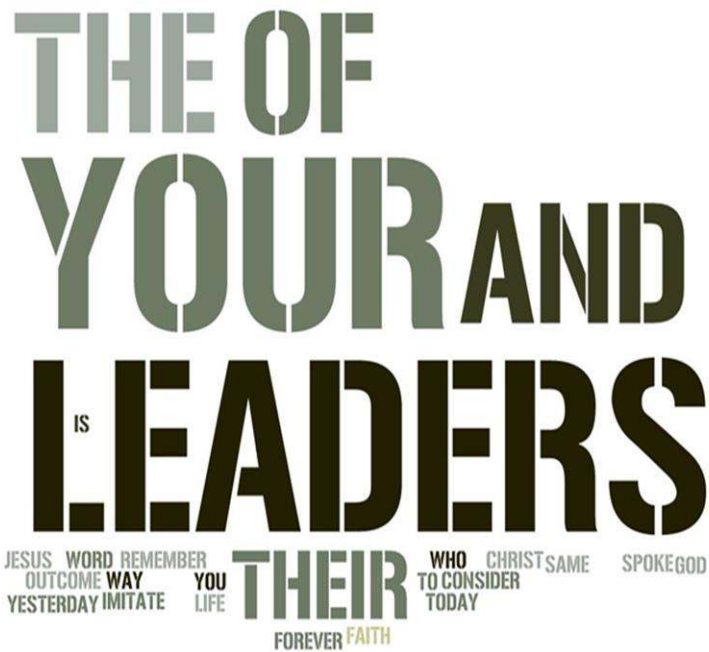
## **Conclusion**

Leadership is a gift from God. Though they are imperfect, our leaders need our constant support through prayer, sincere obedience, and honest feedback. Let us seek to make their work a joy, not a burden.

**Call to Action**

Take some time today to pray specifically for a heart of obedience and submission to leadership given God's grace and mercy. Pray for wisdom and patient endurance for our leaders to love and effectively shepherd the flock of God's people.

**Further reading:** Eph 4:11–13



#### Hebrews 13:9

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*Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings.*

There is a popular saying that “there is nothing new under the sun.” Just as it is today, the first-century church had to deal with several questionable teachings that had become popular in their day. In a brief exhortation, the Hebrew writer felt compelled to warn and remind his readers not to get carried away or deceived by these doctrinal offers that had the potential to affect the faith of the believers.

Why do we, as Christians, need such reminders and warnings? One reason is that false teachings are often very appealing. They come across as extra-spiritual, powerful, and effective. If someone claims that by doing this or practising that, your prayers can get answered quicker or you can gain some special access to divine favours, you might want to give a listening ear, especially if you have been waiting long for an answer to that prayer. Another reason is that false teachings are usually not completely “false.” They often contain some grains of truth that make them sound scripturally correct at face value. Only with deeper study and knowledge of God’s word do we begin to notice that there’s something wrong, just like counterfeit money that looks genuine until you examine it carefully. On the other hand, some false teachings are not from the Bible at all but have their roots in our various cultural beliefs. Cultural beliefs are not necessarily wrong, except where they are at variance with God’s commands. (Matt 15)

In verse 9, the writer referred to the eating of ceremonial foods. The Jews had food laws and traditions called “kosher” laws (e.g., do not eat meat with milk). It is most likely that this is what was being referred to. The point here is that followers of Jesus are spiritually strengthened **by grace**, not by food or other external things (2 Tim 2:1).

As disciples, we should rejoice in the freedom we have to serve God wholeheartedly and to approach the throne of grace boldly and confidently for whatever we need (Heb 4:15).

When our walk with God is weak or when we are weighed down by life's troubles or seemingly insurmountable challenges, these are vulnerable seasons of life when we must be on our guard against offers from supposedly well-meaning people to "go" here or there, get "special" prayers, anoint or concocting solutions, apply strange religious combinations, and the like. What should we do instead?

Recognise Satan's tactic and stand firm! (Eph 6:10-18)

Be strong in the grace! (2 Tim 2:1)

Get on your knees and get into the Word! (Luke 4:16)

Ask others to pray with you and for you! (Matt 26:36)

Know that your God will come through for you! (Luke 18:7-8)

### **Some ways to identify false teachings**

- Arbitrary use of Old Testament laws or traditions that are not reflected in the New Testament. (e.g., commanding the death of a "witch" based on Leviticus 19.). The New Testament commands us to pray for our enemies. Matt 5)
- Teaching is based on one Bible verse only. Do other Scripture passages support this teaching? (e.g., prayer for the dead based on a vague interpretation of 1 Cor 15:29)
- Is it consistent with what we know about the unchanging character of God? (Heb 13:8)
- Does it focus on eternal values or external prejudices (Col 2:21)? (e.g. Compare "love your neighbour as yourself" with "do or do not celebrate Christmas.")

## Conclusion

Let us remember that we have been saved **completely** by the blood of Christ (Heb 7:25) and that we are strengthened by grace, not by external things like what we eat, wear, or touch. Our goal is to grow in becoming like Christ and deepening our knowledge of his Word so that we are not tossed by every wind of teaching (Eph 4:14).

## Call to Action

Aim to deepen your knowledge of the Scriptures this year. Ask for input from your leaders if necessary, on how to study specific topics from the Bible.

**Further Reading: Colossians 2:16-23**

## References:

Eerdmans Commentary of the Bible, 2003, 1480–1481.

International Bible Teaching Ministry with Douglas Jacoby.

<https://www.douglasjacoby.com>



## PLEASING SACRIFICES

### Hebrews 13:15-16

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**Through** *Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.*

*And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*

### From Old Rituals to New Realities

The Izim tribe, once renowned for their devotion to the gods through animal sacrifices, found themselves at an ideological crossroads. A young man named Kael challenged the age-old tradition, advocating for a more compassionate and humane approach to honouring their deities.

Amidst a severe drought, Kael proposed a radical idea: a collective sacrifice of their time and labour to restore their land. The tribe, desperate for salvation from hunger, agreed to his plan. With tireless effort, they transformed their parched earth into a thriving ecosystem, proving that true devotion lay not in bloodshed but in acts of love and care for the land.

In the Old Testament, sacrifices were required to connect with God. But in the New Testament, Jesus' sacrifice made all other sacrifices obsolete. Now, we connect with God through the sincerity of our hearts by being grateful, showing kindness to others, and using our talents to make the world a better place.

Below are some of the various sacrifices we can offer to God:

#### 1. Sacrifice of Praise and Thanksgiving

When we express our gratitude for God's blessings, we acknowledge his goodness and sovereignty. We also invite his presence into our lives through worship.

Here are some specific ways to offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving:

Begin each day with a prayer of thanksgiving.

Keep a gratitude journal.

Sing praise songs or listen to worship music.

## 2. Sacrifice of Doing Good and Sharing

When we reach out to help others, we become channels of God's love and grace. We also demonstrate our obedience to Christ's command to love our neighbours as ourselves.

Here are some specific ways to offer sacrifices for doing good and sharing:

Volunteer your time for a cause you care about.

Donate to charities that are helping people in need.

Perform random acts of kindness, such as holding the door open for someone or letting them go ahead of you in line.

Be generous with your time and resources, even when it's inconvenient.

## 3. Sacrifice of our Time and Talent

We all possess unique talents and abilities. When we dedicate our time and gifts to serving others, we offer a meaningful sacrifice to God. This is a way to live out our faith.

Here are some specific ways to offer sacrifices of our time and talent:

Use your skills and talents to help others in need. For example, if you're good at writing, you could volunteer to help with the church's annual Power Series or write articles for a Christian non-profit.

Get involved in your community by serving on a board or volunteering for a local event.

Mentor a young person or disciple a new believer.

## Conclusion

The author of Hebrews has shown us that pleasing sacrifices in the modern era go beyond ritualistic offerings. They involve a sincere heart, a grateful spirit, and a willingness to serve others. By offering God-pleasing sacrifices, we profoundly connect with the divine.

## Call to Action

Make it a goal to praise and thank God regularly.

Perform acts of kindness and share with those in need.

Use your talents to make a positive impact in and outside your community.

***"In the simplicity of a grateful heart, in the compassion of a helping hand, and in the dedication of our time and talent, we find the modern-day altars for our pleasing sacrifices."***



## THE CITY THAT IS TO COME: HEAVEN IN VIEW

### Hebrews 13:11–14

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*Here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.*

A key feature of the Book of Hebrews is the use of imagery.

The Hebrew writer describes Christians as wanderers, pilgrims, wayfarers, and people to whom this world does not belong. For Christians, this world is not home. Christians are not expected to fit in, and we should not look back to the country from which we came. That is, we must not long for our past lives before being born again because we know that our route to the heavenly kingdom began at Cavalry, where our sins were atoned for.

The failure of some of the recipients of this letter is explained by their lack of focus on our heavenly home. Christians are not to focus on anything this world has to offer, but we are to live in expectation of a better home. Living with heaven in view is daily pressing on to take hold of the nature of Jesus Christ. “*Looking forward to the city that is to come*” indicates that we have no lasting city here in the ‘earthly Jerusalem’, but we are seeking the city of the future, the heavenly Jerusalem. Hebrews 12:22 describes how this city of the future is not like the city of fear but of joy.

Hebrews 11:10 reminds us of Abraham, who responded to God’s call and confidently set out on his way to the place that was destined for him and his descendants. He left, not knowing where he was going to end up. He lived in tents, but *he was looking forward to the city with foundations whose designer and builder is God.*

In 1952, Florence Chadwick attempted to become the first woman to swim the 26 miles between Catalina Island and the California coastline. She began the swim, flanked by a small boat that watched for the sharks. The little crew was prepared to help her if she got hurt or grew tired. After about 15 hours, the

fog set in. She began to doubt her ability and told her mother in the boat. An hour later, unable to see the coastline due to the fog, she discontinued the swim and got into the boat. As she sat in the boat, the fog began to lift, and she found that she had stopped swimming just one mile away from her destination. She later told a reporter when questioned, "I am not trying to make excuses, but if I could have seen the shoreline, I know I could have made it."

Our ultimate example is Jesus, who was able to see 'beyond the fog'. He was tempted to give up, but after prayer, he held on. In the same way, our determination about heaven will guide our actions and inactions. Remember, the shoreline is there, even when you can't see it. We must remember that we are 'strangers' here on earth. Persevere in your conscious effort to overcome sin and live like Jesus.

## **Conclusion**

Jesus has assured us of a place in the city that is to come. We must therefore faithfully keep heaven in view. Let us remember that God can renew our strength and enable us to persevere until we reach the 'shores' of our home in heaven.

## **Call to Action**

Decide the ways that your lifestyle will change as a result of your renewed focus on heaven.

What sins must you repent of?

In what ways will you begin to love and serve others more?

Write down your decision and share it with a friend who can hold you accountable.

**Further Reading:** Philippians 3:17–21; Galatians 4:24–27

## Hebrews 13:20-25

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*Now may the God of peace, who through  
the blood of the eternal covenant brought  
back from the dead our Lord Jesus,  
the great Shepherd of the sheep,  
equip you with everything good for doing his will...*

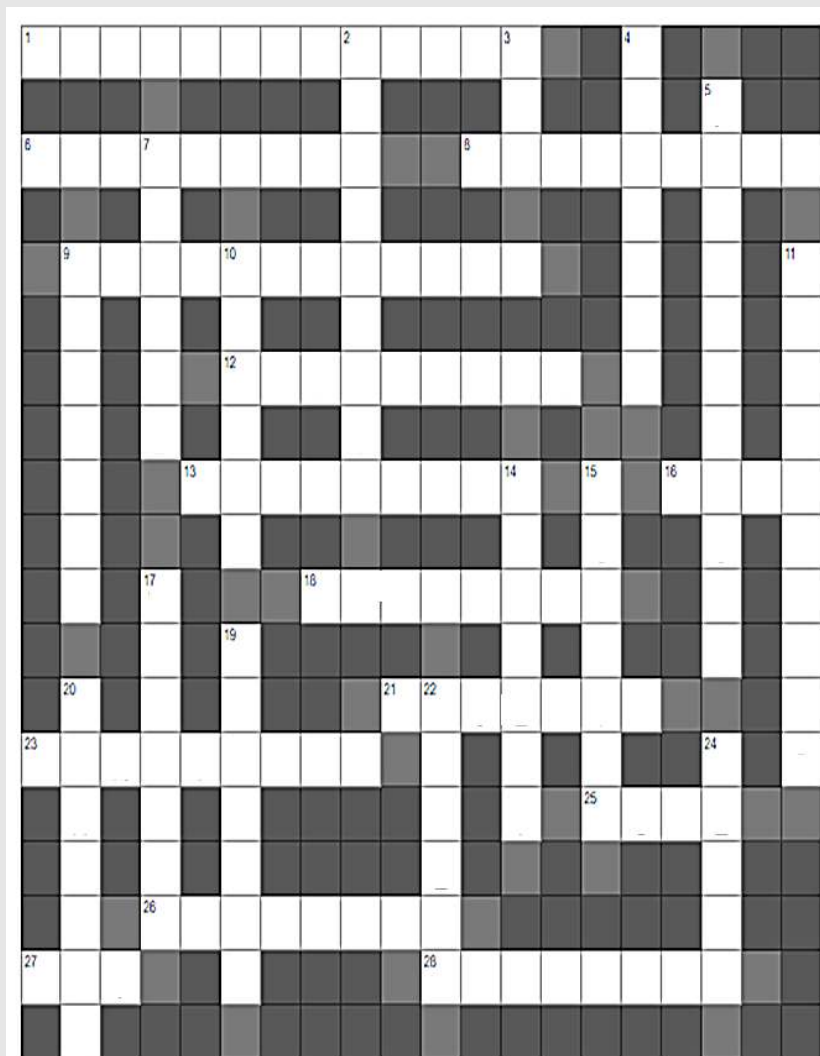
It has been a glorious journey learning the heart of God from the Book of Hebrews. If you are like me, your faith has been strengthened, your vision of Jesus has been sharpened, your understanding of the scriptures has deepened, and you are ready to move into the new year in the power of the Spirit.

We do not know the name of the author who penned this book. Some suggest Apostle Paul; others say it may have been Apollos. No one knows for sure. What God has chosen to reveal in the book is what is important. What are you taking away from your study of Hebrews? How will it transform you going forward?

As we close the book but not our hearts, we have God's promise that he will equip us with whatever we need to do his will. Through Jesus, we can be assured that God will work in us what is pleasing to him and make us what he wants us to be.

To Christ Jesus, our High Priest and King, be glory forever and ever. Amen!

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Turn to next page for clues



## ACROSS

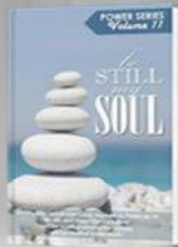
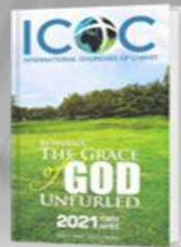
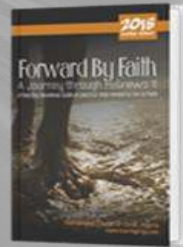
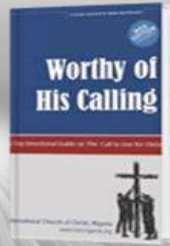
- 1 The bases for God's Judgement
- 6 The leg of a king is placed on it
- 8 People who lived before you
- 9 Act of cleansing
- 12 Action for appointing a king in Israel
- 13 The start of every action
- 16 Produces Heat
- 18 Sun total of althat God created
- 21 One od many tutles of a king
- 23 Birth rank of Esau
- 25 You wear it
- 26 Very Strong
- 27 When you are happy
- 28 Another word for Ministers

## DOWN

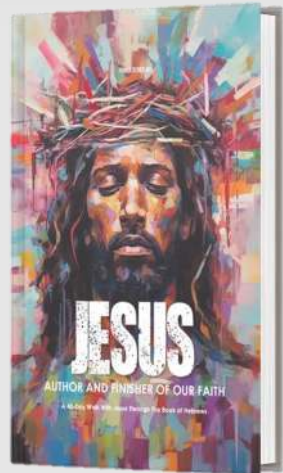
- 2 When you are right with God
- 3 A male child
- 4 The rule for right and wrong
- 5 What you must build your house on
- 7 The seat of a king
- 9 One who speaks on behalf of God
- 10 The visible part of Fire
- 11 Product of a bad heart
- 14 You wear it
- 15 Held by kings as sign of authority
- 17 When we honour God
- 19 19th Book of the New Testament
- 20 The domain of a King
- 22 Ministering Spirits
- 24 Son of God



## 13 EDITIONS OF THE POWER SERIES



In 2011, the Lagos Church, in her bid to encourage all members to kick off the new year with a unified Bible study plan that's tied with 40 days of prayer and fasting, published her first devotional book titled, **"Back To Life"**. The success and acceptance of this debut effort paved the way for what would later be dubbed, the **"Power Series"**. 2024 marks the 13<sup>th</sup> edition of this annual volume as we're happy to allow our readers to download all 13 volumes in PDF. Please click the link <https://bit.ly/3rZeZwn> to download.





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## **JESUS: AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF OUR FAITH**

A 40-Day Walk With Jesus Through The Book of Hebrews

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