SESSION 6

Don’t Walk Away

Rejecting Christ leads to hopelessness.
HOPE DOESN’T COME EASILY, AND IT DOESN’T LAST LONG IF IT’S BASED SOLELY ON CIRCUMSTANCES. THAT’S BECAUSE WHEN THINGS ARE GOING WELL IN OUR LIVES, HOPE BUBBLES UP AND LINGERS. BUT WHEN TOUGH TIMES COME, OUR SENSE OF HOPE FADES AWAY AND SOMETIMES DISAPPEARS.

The biblical idea of hope is different. In Scripture, hope is something that endures. It endures because it’s based on the eternal, Living Lord and not on our circumstances. True hope doesn’t depend on whether things go our way or not. Hope that lasts for eternity is found in a relationship with Christ. No matter the ups and downs of life, Christ-followers have a hope that’s secure.

However, our awareness and experience of hope can grow as our faith in Christ matures. Therefore, growing toward spiritual maturity should matter to us. Christians who take hope seriously have learned that growing in Christ involves obeying Him.

The theme of spiritual maturity in Christ takes center stage in the Book of Hebrews. If we press on toward maturity in Christ, we’ll rejoice in the way He strengthens us. Those who fall away from devotion to Christ because of life’s difficulties or because of opposition to the faith prove they need to grow in their faith or that they’ve never truly received salvation in Him.

“MATURITY STARTS WITH A DECISION; A DECISION TO MAKE OUR GROWTH IN CHRIST A PRIORITY. WHILE WE ARE SAVED BY FAITH AND NOT BY WORKS, OUR GROWTH IN FAITH REQUIRES US TO BE INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS.”

—David Jeremiah
1 Therefore, leaving the elementary message about the Messiah, let us go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, faith in God, teaching about ritual washings, laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

2 And we will do this if God permits.

3 For it is impossible to renew to repentance those who were once enlightened, who tasted the heavenly gift, became companions with the Holy Spirit,

4 tasted God's good word and the powers of the coming age,

5 and who have fallen away, because, to their own harm, they are recrucifying the Son of God and holding Him up to contempt.

6 For ground that has drunk the rain that has often fallen on it and that produces vegetation useful to those it is cultivated for receives a blessing from God.

7 But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and about to be cursed, and will be burned at the end.
The writer of Hebrews contended that by now his readers should have been more mature in the faith than they were acting (see 5:11-14). He compared them to infants whose diet consists only of milk rather than solid food. Many were acting so spiritually immature, they still needed to be fed only the “milk” of God’s Word. In the writer’s judgment, they should’ve been mature enough by that time to teach others. Instead, they were stuck in spiritual kindergarten, still in need of mastering the ABCs of the gospel.

The time had come for these believers to move on toward maturity in Christ. That’s the urgent message the writer wanted to impress on those who were wavering in faith. Some readers gave the distinct impression that they were considering a return to Judaism. They needed to give attention instead to their growth as followers of Christ. Their wavering and disobedience would be an insult to Christ. They would find themselves experiencing the judgment of God and missing His wonderful blessings (see 6:1-8).

If they chose the path of obedience to Christ, they would hold fast to their faith in Him. Moreover, they would continue to express their love for Him by caring for one another. Their obedience would add certainty to the hope they shared in Christ (see 6:9-12).

If, however, they continued to walk down the path of disobedience, they could expect to be held accountable for their rebellion against God. He would judge them because they were trampling on the gift of salvation and grieving the Holy Spirit who had been gracious to them (see 10:26-31).
GROW IN FAITH (Hebrews 6:1-3)

The writer began this section with the word therefore. This word links the teachings in chapters 4 and 5 about Jesus as the believer’s Great High Priest with the writer’s passionate warning against immaturity. To settle for an immature faith—whether out of spiritual laziness or fear—would be a disastrous choice for any believer to make.

Moreover, such a decision makes no sense. Believers have a Great High Priest in Jesus Christ. He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. He Himself learned obedience to the Father through the sufferings He endured (see 5:8). Consequently, Jesus is the Source of help for all who follow Him.

We must not misunderstand what the writer meant in verse 1 by leaving, or moving beyond, the basic principles of the doctrine of Christ. He didn’t mean to let go of the gospel in favor of some other set of beliefs. Rather, he meant that once someone has trusted in Christ for salvation, that believer is to grow spiritually, based on the truths already embraced. To leave the elementary teachings means to take the basics of the faith and to start threading together words, sentences, paragraphs, and chapters of obedient Christian living. The moment people receive Christ as Savior and Lord, they begin writing an ongoing story of their new life in Christ.

With the words let us in verse 1, the writer encouraged his readers as a fellow believer. He was a beloved Christian leader and teacher, yet he included himself among those who needed to keep pressing on toward spiritual maturity. The apostle Paul echoed this thought when he admitted that he too—although fully captured by Christ—hadn’t yet reached the goal of full maturity. Every day, Paul put the past behind him and reached forward to what lay ahead (see Philippians 3:12-14). So should we.
The writer listed these six basic truths of the gospel as a foundation for our lives:

1. **Repentance.** Works-based religions insist that we have to earn our salvation by doing good deeds. The gospel declares that even our best deeds are dead. They have no power to undo our sinful nature. We must repent of—that is, turn away from—our sinful deeds. Moreover, we must repent of trusting in our own goodness.

2. **Faith.** Not faith in just anything, however, but faith in God. God was in Christ, the Bible says, reconciling the world to Himself (see 2 Corinthians 5:19). In repentance we turn away from trust in self; in faith we turn to God, trusting in Jesus Christ as the One the Father sent to be the Savior of the world (see John 3:16-17).

**How would you explain repentance and faith to a friend who doesn’t know Christ?**

3. **Baptisms.** This instruction may have been related to an understanding of believer’s baptism. However, the plural form of the word suggests that the writer might have been referring to the cleansing rites that were part of the readers’ background in Judaism. The instruction may have been a clarification between Christian baptism and Jewish rituals. From the earliest preaching of the gospel, baptism by immersion in water was presented as the initial act of obedience in the believer’s confession of Christ as Lord (see Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:37-38; 9:36-38).

4. **The laying on of hands.** In the Book of Acts, this simple act of worship often was connected with the Holy Spirit’s presence in and empowerment of believers (see Acts 6:6; 8:17; 13:3; 19:6; 28:8). In addition, the act was used in affirming the spiritual gifts and calling of church leaders (see 2 Timothy 1:6).

5. **Resurrection of the dead.** Because of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, Christians also live with the sure hope that in Him we will be resurrected (see 1 Corinthians 15:20-22).

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**Key Doctrine: Security in Jesus**

All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end.
6. **Eternal judgment.** After death comes the judgment (see Hebrews 9:27). We will all stand before the Lord in judgment one day. For believers, however, standing before Him in judgment will be a time of reward and blessing, an experience of honoring the One who has set all things right (see 1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

As we obey Christ, God permits us to build our lives on the foundation of the gospel. We never want to neglect, drift off of, or walk away from the foundation. But neither are we to stay on the ground floor of faith. We are to grow, building on the gospel foundation toward a fully mature, Christlike life (see Ephesians 4:14-16).

*What does obeying the Lord teach you about faith in Him?*

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**DON’T WALK AWAY (Hebrews 6:4-8)**

These verses are among the most challenging to understand in the Book of Hebrews. Sincere Bible students arrive at different views about whether the verses describe an immature believer, a person who professes to be a believer but proves not to be, or a hypothetical example meant to show how unthinkable it is for believers to retreat from their confession of Christ. The verses build on the writer’s encouragement in 6:1-3 to press on toward spiritual maturity.

The writer had warned his readers not to follow the example of the rebellious Israelites in Old Testament times (see 3:7-11). That generation of God’s people had stood on the threshold of the promised land but refused to enter. They were afraid of the obstacles they faced in the land. They didn’t trust God to keep His promises. Consequently, God didn’t permit that generation to enter the land and receive the blessings He had in store for them. He didn’t disown them or declare they never belonged to Him. Yet neither did He allow any of the disobedient ones to settle in the land. They died in the wilderness.
Now fast-forward to the New Testament age. Were some of the readers of Hebrews drifting dangerously close to a similar fate? Their lack of faith didn’t involve a geographical promise but rather a promise of full and meaningful life in Christ (see John 10:10). They flirted with a return to Judaism, similar to the way the rebellious Israelites had talked about returning to Egypt (see Numbers 14:3-4).

**How does the description of the believer in Hebrews 6:4b-5 compare to your understanding of what it means to be a Christ-follower?**

Some understand verses 4-6 to describe people who profess to follow Christ but in reality are not genuine believers. In this view, the warning was that those who walk away from Christ could become so hardened in their unbelief that God would cease to convict their hearts or draw them to Christ for salvation.

Others understand the verses to describe stubbornly wayward believers so entrenched in disobedience that they no longer saw their need of repentance. They would lose their rewards—but not their salvation—in the judgment (see 1 Corinthians 3:15).

Still others understand these verses as a hypothetical example that if it were possible (although in truth it isn’t) for someone to experience salvation and then later renounce Christ, that person could never be renewed to repentance. Such rebellion would be like trying to recrucify Christ and hold Him up to contempt. Thus, the writer warned his readers how unthinkable it was to retreat in faith.

Finally, God blesses those who press on in faith toward spiritual maturity. Our bold confession of Christ even in the face of opposition or challenges demonstrates the reality of our faith. It’s the evidence of genuine salvation.
Believers must be diligent to demonstrate their salvation, ever moving toward greater maturity. Mature believers can warn others of the dangers of immaturity and disobedience. Believers can help one another understand that Christianity is a lifelong faith commitment that grows and produces spiritual fruit.

**What specific actions do you need to take toward strengthening your relationship with Christ? Who can help you be accountable for this action?**

**In what ways can you warn someone about the dangers of failing to grow spiritually without sounding judgmental or superior?**

**What role can you play in helping others mature in faith and produce spiritual fruit?**

**MEMORIZE**

For God is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the love you showed for His name when you served the saints—and you continue to serve them. — Hebrews 6:10
Use the space provided to make observations and record prayer requests during the group experience for this session.

**MY THOUGHTS**
Record insights gained and questions to discuss during the group experience.

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**MY PRAYERS**
List specific prayer needs and answers to remember this week.

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**MY MISSION**
Acknowledge ways you will obey God’s Word this week.

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