

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Over the years, I've found my life changing and my faith deepening as I meet with our heavenly Father in His word. This has been especially true as I've been writing these devotionals and having to live what I write.

I long for you to be able to say the same as you read through this letter.

As I've gotten to know Paul, James, Peter, Jude, and John through their letters, I'm overwhelmed by how they were changed by knowing and walking with their Lord. How much they must have longed for us to know Him as they did.

As John wrote in 1 John 2:3-6, he wants us to walk as Jesus did and believed that it was absolutely possible to do so. So how did Jesus walk? That's one secret our Father shares with us.

Blessings on your time as we take another walk with the Father,

Margie Martin

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Hebrews God Speaks

The background of this letter to the Hebrews is probably the most intriguing of any book or letter we have in the Bible because of what we *don't* know: who wrote it, who received it, and when it was written. We probably won't know the answers to any of these questions this side of eternity, but we can probably figure out *why* it was written when it was and *why* we need to read it now.

Why It Was Written

This letter was written in the second half of the first century but before Rome destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70 as Christianity was growing and its differences with Judaism were becoming obvious. Judaism had been protected by Rome and had history and tradition; now being known as a Christian, or a follower of Jesus, could result in persecution to the point of death. The time to choose between the two had come. The writer of the letter (and God Himself) was deeply concerned that these Hebrew believers in the faith would choose safety and security over Jesus and eternity.

This letter sets out the logical argument of why Jesus was worth following by using the words *better* and *superior*. The author compares Jesus Christ to the angels, to Moses, to the priests Aaron and Melchizedek, to Abraham, and to following a program or a tradition.

Why We Need to Read It Now

Do you come from a spiritual heritage that's historical, systematic, and structured but leaves you with a hole in your soul that isn't being filled? *Then this letter is for you.*

Are you wondering if following Jesus is worth the effort, especially since He wants to be in charge of you and how you live? While you may need to do some extra reading in the Old Testament for background information, *this letter is for you.*

Have you been a Christian for a while but feel that something's missing? *Then this letter is for you.*

Do you have some friends or neighbors who are asking questions? *Then this letter is for you.*

Have you gotten the idea that this letter is for you? I know it's for me. I've loved it over the years but have never looked at it section by section. I'm looking forward to seeing what God has for you and me as we read through this letter to Hebrew believers.

As you spend time in this letter, please take the time to talk with our Father about what He's showing you so you're not just gathering information. As you pray, you can use the space on each page to journal your thoughts or write Him a note.

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 1:1-14

“Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?”

What do you know about angels? In the Middle Ages they were often the subject of paintings and sculpture. Today angels are showing up again. Sometimes it seems like people concentrate more on angels and what they can do for us than on Jesus. I think this is the point that the author of this letter is making to his Hebrew audience. Instead of telling stories about how angels had assisted Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Balaam, or Daniel, he wants his readers to compare the role of angels to the role of the Son, Jesus Christ. Other New Testament writers also warned against worshipping angels, so this must have been a common practice in the first century. So what do we learn about Jesus being superior to the angels?

1. After 400 years of silence, God began to speak to us by His Son. v. 1-2
2. God appointed Jesus as heir of all things. v. 2
3. God made the universe through Jesus. v. 2
4. Jesus is the radiance of God's glory. v. 3
5. Jesus is the exact representation of God's being. v. 3
6. Jesus sustains all things by His powerful word. v. 5
7. Jesus provided purification for sins and then sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. v. 3
8. Jesus is God's Son; angels aren't part of the family. v. 5
9. God had the angels worship Jesus when He was born. v. 6
10. God established His throne forever and set Jesus above His companions. v. 8, 9
11. Jesus will remain forever while the earth will wear out and perish. v. 10-12
12. God made the Son's enemies as a foot stool for His feet. v. 13

Why do you think we tend to honor and worship angels—or anything else—more than Jesus? I wonder if it's because we don't know, realize, or remember that Jesus is approachable and available? We may forget that He lived here on earth for more than 30 years, that He was born into a poor family rather than a wealthy one, that He knows how to work hard and love those under His care, and that He suffered more than we can ever imagine. This is a *knowledge* issue because Jesus *knows* and cares.

Perhaps we just don't *want* to submit to anyone else's authority, so we ignore who Jesus really is and has the right to be in our lives. This is a *heart* issue. What's important to you these days? More important than Jesus?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 2:1-4

“We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.” (emphasis added)

I’m always amazed at how human nature doesn’t change. Apart from our modern conveniences and advanced technology, we aren’t any different from believers in the first century. In fact, they knew that every message spoken by angels was binding and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment—this was their tradition and heritage. But their flaw—like our flaw—was that they didn’t take it seriously for themselves; it was only for others. So they tended to *drift* away rather than fall away or be taken off course by another, like a canoe that hasn’t been secured.

So how do we pay *more* careful attention to what we have heard? Remember Paul’s words to the Corinthians, *“We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”?* (2 Corinthians 10:5) Our tendency is to say or think, “Yeah, but” or we rationalize and think that one time won’t matter.

Let’s return to our passage. What does the writer of this letter want us to *pay more careful attention to*? His audience was elevating angels to be higher in their spiritual hierarchy than Jesus, but when we look at yesterday’s 12 reasons for why Jesus is superior to the angels, logically we should be singing *His* praises all day long.

The salvation Jesus provides He announced and demonstrated when He was here on earth and confirmed to us through the words and changed lives of those who followed Him. God testified to it through the signs, wonders, and miracles Jesus performed and later through the actions of His followers.

God also testified to it through the gifts of the Spirit distributed according to His will. These gifts aren’t just the ones we tend to think of—speaking in an unknown language or ability to heal another—but are seen when a group of believers work together on a common cause that God has called them to. Their abilities work together so well that it’s as though they’re one person, which they are—the body of Christ with Jesus as their head directing them. The gifts of the Spirit aren’t to honor or bring attention to us personally but to bless others, whether believers or nonbelievers.

Conclusion? Since Jesus is superior to the angels and has made salvation available to us, you and I must *pay more careful attention to* the truth we’ve heard.

As you look back over the past 24 hours, what have you been paying attention to: the price of gas, your golf or tennis game, a co-worker instead of your spouse, the next big deal? Are you drifting away? If you were to *pay more careful attention to* what you have heard, how would you be thinking about these same topics? Time to stop the drift?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 2:5-18

“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 [and sisters].”

Do you think of Jesus as your brother? Didn't think so. I believe this relationship with Him is one that we've missed over the centuries. We can easily think of Him as Lord and Savior, the One with whom we'll have to answer to—but a brother? But He chose to become a brother to us, did what had to be done to become a brother, and isn't ashamed to be related to us.

Do you have any brothers? I don't, but over the years I've watched my three stepsons relate to each other. What makes a *good* brother? A good brother looks out for his siblings, is like a father figure to the younger ones but more approachable, keeps the family together, and is a role model. Maybe your experience as a brother or with a brother falls far short of this description, but does that diminish the ideal? I don't think so; I think the shortcomings of our siblings and ourselves should make us look to Jesus as the brother we need and long for.

So how is Jesus a brother for us? The writer of this letter gives us this information:

- Jesus will declare (speak out) your name to other believers. v. 12
- Jesus will sing your praises to other believers. v. 12
- Jesus will put His trust in you. v. 13
- Jesus will stand with us. v. 13
- Jesus shared in our humanity on earth (struggles, joys, stress, loneliness) so He will destroy our enemy who held us in slavery through fear of death. v. 14-15
- Jesus helps us as Abraham's descendants. v. 16
- Jesus was made like us in every way so He could be what we need. v. 17
- Jesus suffered when He was tempted, so He can help us when we are being tempted and when we suffer. v. 18

Is this your Jesus? Do you run to Him like a perfect older brother when life overwhelms you? Do you know—way down deep—that Jesus really does know what you're going through and that He really can help? If this truth is new to you, how are you going to get to know Jesus in this way? How about talking to Him about it for a while? I bet He has some ideas.

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 3:1-6

“Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.”

When stress starts weighing down on you, when life doesn't make sense, when whatever you do doesn't seem to work, what do you do? Who do you go to? The writer of Hebrews tells us to *fix* our thoughts on Jesus rather than look to the right or the left. So why would *fixing* our thoughts on Him make any difference? Let's chart it out.

Looking at Jesus	Looking at Everything but Jesus
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The apostle (sent one) from God	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High priest who offers sacrifices for our sin	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changeable, fickle
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appointed by God as a son responsible for God's family	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No one taking responsibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Faithful	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Undependable
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Became like us so He understands	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uncaring
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• His death took care of the sin problem forever—for all of us	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No hope
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Will destroy the one who holds the power of death—the devil	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No power
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Able to help those who are being tempted	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No concern

So if we depend on ourselves or others, we're limited because we're all fickle; what pleases us one day doesn't suit us the next. If we depend on our own work or abilities, we're limited. If we depend on the government, it's limited. *But Jesus* is constant, proven, always available, always has the best intentions toward us, never changes, can't be put in a box, isn't limited by time and space, knows the future, understands the past—and loves us.

When hard times come, who are you going to *fix* your thoughts on, not letting them waiver? It's like being a horse with blinders; all we can do is fix our eyes on what's in front of us—Jesus.

The author of this letter acknowledges how hard it is to fix our thoughts on Jesus. In the last sentence of this section, he says to *“hold on to our courage”* and *“the hope of which we boast.”* It takes courage to keep our thoughts on Jesus rather than give into fear and panic. It takes courage and strength to remember that Jesus won the war at the cross and then live that way when we're in the midst of life. What are you looking at these days?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 3:7-19

“But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.”

I think one of the most interesting words in Scripture is *but*. How often do we hear and say “I know God says I can trust Him, but I’m . . .”

We know truth, but we rationalize and don’t do what God says to do (or do what He says not to). I think the choice to not believe God and then experience what follows is *sin’s deceitfulness*. Sin leads us to believe that God doesn’t really know what’s happening or care. But what if we said:

I’m worried, *but* God knows the future.

I’m lonely, *but* God is everywhere at the same time so is here with me.

I’m unsure, *but* God knows everything.

I’m scared, *but* God is all powerful.

When we listen to sin and follow its directives, we become hardened, stiff, unable to flex, set in stone. I’m experiencing this truth in a physical way. Because I’m on the computer so much and don’t stretch the way I should, my neck and shoulders are stiff, and I’m often in pain. While I’m stretching now, it’s hard to undo the years of damage I’ve allowed to happen because I believed the lie that how I position my upper body doesn’t matter, just as long as I can continue doing what I enjoy—but what is harmful.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that God tested the Israelites in the desert; Moses even told them what God was doing and why. (Exodus 20:20) How did the Israelites respond? They knew they should trust, but they:

- Hardened their hearts.
- Were rebellious.
- Tested and tried God.
- Saw God working for 40 years without letting belief happen.
- Let their hearts go astray.
- Haven’t known God’s ways.
- Allowed sinful, unbelieving hearts to turn from the living God.
- Heard but rebelled.
- Stayed in unbelief.

We all use the word *but* in our thinking; the question is, though, do our sentences end with God or with our situations? The answer determines how we’re living: either in synch with the God of the universe or out of synch with Him and everyone around us. Is *but* your friend or your foe?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 4:1-13

“ . . . a Sabbath-rest for the people of God . . . ”

Is a *Sabbath-rest* a new phrase for you? The other writers in the New Testament don't refer to it, probably because most wrote to non-Jewish believers. But as we know, this letter was sent to men and women who knew the Old Testament better than most of us can imagine. A mere mention of an event would remind them of stories they had heard since childhood—just like the stories in our own families.

So what is a Sabbath-rest? The writer reminds us that at creation God worked for six days and then He rested because His work was done. Everything was set and ready to go. What God created was perfect: Eden had all that humans could ever want, the animals all got along, the plants didn't have to compete with weeds, and Adam and Eve freely enjoyed each other and God who created them. God remained active after creation, but His “work” was done.

How we long to get back to Eden. But what happened? God wanted this man and woman to trust Him and follow what He said was best. How else could they have had a friendship? When a choice is made, however, consequences follow. The serpent tempted the woman (not the man), and she made a decision without consulting either the One who created her or the one she was created to help. She persuaded the man to join her by restating the problem with a slant, and he concurred, siding with her without consulting the One who had created him, spent lots of wonderful time with him, and had given him the directive *not* to do what he was going to do—the only *no* He had given; everything else was a *yes*.

Sin entered the scene, and the Sabbath-rest needed to be put back into place. The choices of the man and woman had to be “fixed.” And this is what Jesus did on the cross. God accepted His Son's sacrifice and raised Him from the dead to a quality of life that is called *eternal life*; Sabbath-rest now depends on Jesus' gift of life through His death. We don't have to try to be good enough for God. The work is DONE. All we have to do is accept it and live in it. How do we do that? I think it's by living out yesterday's *but* statements that end with God. “This is what I see as reality, *but* God is”

Make no mistake; God isn't fooled by anything we say to look spiritual while inwardly saying something totally different. Living in Sabbath-rest doesn't mean we're inactive; it means we're living out the life God has provided through His Son. It isn't easy, but it isn't impossible either. Are you enjoying a Sabbath-rest these days?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 4:14-5:10

“Although he was a son, [Jesus] learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who believe him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.”

Today is Christmas Eve for me, and God just gave me a Christmas gift from this section in Hebrews. Let’s see if I can pull together all the thoughts swirling around in my head and heart. Melchizedek is one of my favorite Bible people because he was the point of the talk I heard the night I became a Christian. So why and how is this man connected to Jesus?

- For the Jewish people, priests and kings could never be the same people; in fact, they were to come from different lines: priests from Aaron and kings from Judah.
- Abraham met an exception (even before the rule was made) in Genesis 14. Melchizedek as king of Salem (Jerusalem) met Abraham and then blessed him as a priest would even though the Jewish nation hadn’t even been formed yet. Melchizedek blessed Abraham by *“God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.”* (Genesis 14:19)

In today’s section, the writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus as King was made a high priest by God (no one could take the honor upon himself) in the order of Melchizedek, whom we’ll meet again in Hebrews 7.

So today as Christmas is almost here, God is telling me that through Mary (who was from the priestly line of Aaron) and through Joseph (who was from the kingly line of Judah), Jesus was born. Through the suffering Jesus endured, He learned obedience that took Him to the cross. And through Jesus’ perfect sacrifice (He didn’t deserve it), God said that His problem with sin was resolved. Therefore, Jesus became *our* high priest (the one who could offer a sacrifice for all). And because Jesus defeated Satan and his control, He also defeated the power of sin, He became our warrior King—just like Melchizedek, the *king* of Salem (or peace).

Today probably isn’t Christmas Eve for you, but today is the day that you can reaffirm that Jesus is your high priest who connects you to God, and that Jesus is the King who rules your life—in the details, in your thought life, and in your relationships. Merry Christmas, my friend!

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 4:14-5:10

“... let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.”

Before we continue with Hebrews, let's take a day to look at the role of high priest as God designed it and at how Jesus is *our* eternal high priest. When Jesus died on the cross, Matthew tells us that the curtain in the temple that separated everyday people from God's presence was torn in half from top to bottom, the way you'd tear a sheet of paper. (Matthew 27:5) Access to God Himself was made available to everyone at anytime; the barrier was removed. What a transition for the Jewish people. No wonder the writer of Hebrews wanted to bring this point home to his readers.

Paul tells us that we're all priests and have direct access to God, so what do we learn about these priests from this section?

- Selected from among men
- Appointed to represent them in matters related to God
- Offered gifts and sacrifices for sins (priests offered them daily, high priest offered them once a year)
- Able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and going astray since he himself is subject to weakness—this is why he has to offer sacrifices for himself and the sins of the people
- Given this honor; no one could take it for himself

Jesus as high priest:

- Came in the form of a man and suffered in every way we do so He can sympathize with us, and we can know He understands
- Tempted in every way just as we are—yet without sin
- Given the position by God
- Offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the One who could save Him from death and was heard because of His reverent submission (but He still had to go to the cross)
- Learned obedience from what He suffered, even though He was God's Son
- Once He was made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and then was designated to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek

What do you do in a time of need: fall apart or yell at the heavens? Today we get a third option: *hold on firmly* to the faith we talk about when times are good and *approach* the throne of grace with confidence because our very own high priest is sitting there, waiting to give us mercy and grace when we ask. What are you waiting for?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 5:11-6:3

“ . . . because you are slow to learn.”

I think the most encouraging groups of Christians to be around are new believers and those who stay faithful to the end. As a young Christian, I often wondered what the basics of the faith were and what spiritual maturity looked like. Today’s section and 1 John 2:12-14 hold the answers for me. Let’s focus on what the writer of Hebrews has to say about elementary teachings and what they mean. Tomorrow we’ll look at spiritual maturity.

Repentance from acts that lead to death: stop sinning and go the other way

Instructions about baptisms: aligning ourselves with the family of God and letting Christ’s blood wash over us so we’re clean of sin and living a newness of life

Laying on of hands: being under the authority of God through our local church so that whatever we do, we do as part of the Body of Christ

Resurrection of the dead: Jesus’ death on the cross completely took care of the sin problem with God so that Jesus’ resurrection life is available to us and we’re no longer bound by sin and death

Eternal judgment: as believers we’ll have a final evaluation time with Christ. We’ll get to be amazed at all that we did by faith that we hadn’t been aware of, and we’ll have to admit to what we did without God here on earth that we hadn’t already owned up to. Our role in eternity will be based on this final evaluation time. Don’t you want to spend hours, days, months, and even years rejoicing over what Jesus did through you that you hadn’t been aware of?

Is this elementary teaching the foundation of your faith? I don’t think it was for me for a long time, and as a result, I was up and down emotionally and spiritually. I depended on feelings rather than faith and so was easily influenced by what others said and did.

What does your foundation look like—firm or wavering? What do you need to shore up today?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 5:11-6:3

“... because you are slow to learn.”

Now that our foundation is firm, let's take a look at what constitutes spiritual maturity:

Teaching on righteousness: what right thinking and right acting look like in the here and now

Constantly train themselves to distinguish good from evil: always evaluating what they see and hear in their world and in themselves based on the truth in Scripture

Elementary teaching is described as milk. Babies drink milk produced by their mothers who have digested what they've eaten so the infants can handle it. As children get their teeth, they begin eating soft foods. Finally they are able to chew meat. An adult who only drinks milk would be thought of as strange.

But these Hebrews Christians are like adults who only drink milk. They should be taking in the truth of Scriptures themselves, digesting it, and living on it. Instead they're depending on others and not taking responsibility for themselves.

Which group do you see yourself in? If the first, the writer of Hebrews has a warning for us that we'll look at tomorrow. If the second, we're encouraged to teach others how to get to this point of maturity, how to keep on living out the righteousness of Christ, and how to keep on distinguishing good from evil in our world and in our lives—no rationalizing allowed.

What challenge do you hear from today's section?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 6:4-12

"We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised."

Has this section sent shivers down your spine as you wonder if you could lose your eternal security? Or has it confirmed your fear that nothing is forever, including God? I admit that these aren't my concerns and fears, but I've known of others who have them.

After reading through today's section a few times and asking God what He wants me to see, a thought is developing that fits in with what we've been seeing elsewhere in the letter. Remember, Hebrews was written to a group of Jewish believers who were hesitant in their faith because of growing persecution from being known as Christians. Being a Jew was okay, but being a follower of Jesus Christ wasn't.

So how does the author of Hebrews encourage them (and us) when we begin to waiver?

Reminder of what they have: They've been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift shared in the Spirit, and tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age.

How did you just respond to reading what you've been given? I started sitting up a little straighter and breathing a little deeper; a peace came over me that settled me and set my feet on solid ground. How about you? Did you let these words wash over your soul and your spirit?

Well known farming example: The same rain falls on adjacent acres of land, and what happens depends on the quality of the land, not on the rain that is available to all. So if what God provides is available to all and if God is just, what's the problem? The problem is us and whether we'll stay faithful to what we've been given or let fear and laziness take us down a different road and then wonder, "What happened?"

What could his readers do differently? What can we do? We're told to hold onto the diligence we had as new believers so our hope will win out. We're told to keep from being lazy by imitating those who through faith and patience have inherited what has been promised. You say you don't have any of these examples around you? We'll look at a whole group of role models in Hebrews 11. For now, you may want to review the elementary teaching from 2 days ago.

Is fear, complacency, laziness, or self-sufficiency beginning to creep into your thinking? It has for me. But is this where you really want to go? What are you hearing today, and what are you going to do about it?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 6:13-20

“And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.”

Abraham was in a precarious situation. God made promises to him but took a long time to fulfill them. It would have been so easy for Abraham to waiver in his belief. *But God* did fulfill His promises.

The Hebrew readers of this letter were in a precarious situation too. They felt safe in their recognized religion, they had history, and they had traditions to hold onto. Then along comes this message of Jesus: He hadn't stayed dead after He was crucified, the curtain in the temple that separated them from God had been torn in half at the moment of His death, and He wanted them to know Him and follow Him as His disciples had. The message sounded good, but could they trust Him to do what He promised? Would He, could He, make them acceptable to God based on His perfect goodness and not on their sporadic attempts at faith?

Today for me is the inauguration of a president who has promised us everything, and millions believe his promises. But can he deliver on them, and will government do for us what we as individuals haven't been willing to do for ourselves? Time will tell.

But God's promises have come true as He described them—never as quickly or easily as we wished, but as He promised. Abraham did have a son (two in fact) who was the father of a nation that includes us since we are his spiritual sons and daughters. What God promises, He delivers. The greatest proof of God delivering on His promises is Jesus: He came when He didn't have to, lived a lifestyle like ours and not what He deserved, and died when He didn't have to for acts He didn't do.

If our God promised and delivered in the past and has made promises for our futures, won't He come through? The author of this letter writes, *“Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath.”* (v. 17) We're told that it's impossible for God to lie, so

How would you finish the last sentence? The writer of Hebrews says we have *“this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”* For his readers, the writer is hoping that they'll follow Jesus and leave behind what wasn't meant to be depended on. What will this hope mean for you? What will you do, and what will you leave behind? It's easy to talk about faith and make promises. The hard part is the follow through. God did it. Jesus did it. With the life of Christ in you through the Spirit of our risen Lord, you can do it. Will you?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 7:1-10

"[Melchizedek] met Abraham . . . and blessed him."

We Gentiles tend to be confused by this section because our history hasn't been tied to the tribes of Israel, specifically the tribe of Levi in Israel's history of worship. Once I learned that my spiritual heritage is that of the Jewish nation, I started learning about and loving its richness.

Need a little background? The 12 tribes (sons of Jacob and Joseph—long story) were given areas of land, except for the tribe of Levi. This one tribe became responsible for the elements of worship and the temple itself. So they would have time to serve the spiritual needs of their brother countrymen, God said that the other tribes were to give a tenth of their produce to the Levites. (Now you know the background of tithing.)

When Abraham met Melchizedek who was a priest of God, Abraham gave him a tenth of what he had gotten from defeating the kings in battle. But this was two generations before the tribes existed and hundreds of years before the law was given to Moses about the Levites taking care of the spiritual life of Israel.

Abraham was a wealthy, powerful, and well-known man, and yet he honored Melchizedek. Abraham is one of the heroes of Judaism and Christianity, and yet he honored Melchizedek. Melchizedek is a big deal. He has no beginning or end. He is a priest forever. Melchizedek came out to meet Abraham and then blessed him. Melchizedek initiated, sought out, began a relationship with, and blessed Abraham.

How are you at initiating spiritual relationships with those who are younger than you spiritually? Do you go to them or wait for them to come to you? And what do you do and say when you do reach out? Do you talk about yourself and put rules in their way, or do you bless others?

What does it mean to bless someone? What happens when you feel blessed by someone? I feel blessed by those who are totally sold out to living with Jesus as Lord care about me without having an agenda or wanting to fix me. I think they know Jesus is the only one who can take us from who we are to the person Jesus died for us to be. I think their personal sin accounts are small because they own up to and deal with their own issues so quickly that they're absolutely humble and approachable. I think they care more about me and how I'm doing than about themselves.

Oh my. If this is the definition of blessing others, I fall so short. How are you doing with being one who blesses?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 7:11-28

“... because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him . . .”

Before we get to the good part about Jesus and Melchizedek, let's make sure we know the differences between the priesthood and Jesus.

Levitical Priesthood	Jesus
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tied to the law	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Came from tribe of Judah, which had nothing to do with priests
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Was given to the people	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Based on the power of an indestructible life (Melchizedek didn't have a beginning or end, and Jesus didn't stay dead)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• From the order of Aaron	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Was like Melchizedek
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Based on regulations as to ancestry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduces a better hope by which we draw near to God
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weak and useless (can't make anything perfect)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resurrection proves His power
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• God's proclamation not needed for someone to become a priest	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• God made an oath to establish Jesus
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Every priest dies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jesus lives forever so has a permanent priesthood
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Priests offer sacrifices every day, first for their own sins and then for the sins of the people	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jesus' sacrifice for sins was once for all when He offered Himself; He became the sacrifice
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High priests are men who are weak (because we all are)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• David's oath (Psalm 110:4) came after the law (Moses' time); God appointed the Son who was made perfect

So what *conclusions* can we make about Jesus being a priest in the order of Melchizedek? 1. Trying to be acceptable to God by following the Law doesn't work since the Law sets perfect standards so we can see how imperfect we are. 2. The priests can't save us because they're as weak and sinful as we are. 3. We need a different kind of priest—one chosen by God and who lives forever so he can talk to God about all of us for all time. Such a priest needs to be holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens, yet able to understand and care for our weaknesses because he's lived as we do but never gave into temptation.

Who can fill this job description? Jesus. And Jesus provides a better hope for us since He allows us to draw near to God. Are you depending on the "to do" method, or are you drawing near?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 8:1-6

“We do have such a high priest . . . who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.”

So we know what high priests did here on earth: they offered both gifts and sacrifices, and they served in the sanctuary. We’re told that the earthly sanctuary was a copy and shadow of what is in heaven where Jesus, our high priest, is now serving. But two questions come to mind: what *didn’t* the earthly priests do, and what is Jesus doing *now*—right now—because the writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is still at work? Let’s look at the first question today; tomorrow we’ll tackle the second one as we finish this section.

What didn’t the earthly priests do? Asking this question has helped me put a lot into perspective. I’ve loved studying the Old Testament over the years, but what I realized today is that the work of the priests went only one way. They offered gifts and sacrifices for themselves and the sake of the people, but they were never involved in their lives. I don’t ever remember reading that they counseled, encouraged, or financially helped people. They just took care of the temple area and the sanctuary and offered gifts and sacrifices. They were respected and valued but not available and approachable. They kept themselves apart.

I’m not critical of them for what they didn’t do, just observing. But if this role was what the people were used to, how refreshing it must have been to have Jesus in their midst because He talked and walked and ate with them. He *saw* individuals and made time for them. He brought God to people and made His Father available and approachable in their everyday lives. Any perception of distance and formality was replaced with intimacy and family. Remember Melchizedek who *came out to meet* Abraham? Jesus is a different kind of high priest and far superior to the earthy ones.

Is this your picture of Jesus? Is this how you interact with Him? If not, what in your thinking needs to change? How about talking to Him about this? We’ll look at what He’s doing now—right now—when we meet again.

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 8:1-6

“We do have such a high priest . . . who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.”

The turning point for me when I shifted from knowing about Jesus and what He did on the cross to letting Him be in charge came when I realized that Jesus was alive now and wanted to be involved in my life. That challenge came as fast as a flash of lightning and changed my life from night to day. I think that this truth about Jesus is what our writer of Hebrews is getting at in this section.

We do have [not had] a high priest . . . who serves [not served] in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by men. But the ministry Jesus has received [not had received] is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and is [not was] founded on better promises.

So if Jesus is alive now and working, what is He doing? Let’s return to a passage we’ve already looked at but see it from a different view:

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. 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. Hebrews 4:15-16

So what is Jesus doing right now? He provides mercy and grace to help us in our time of need. The catch, though, is that we need to approach Him at the throne of grace—with confidence—and ask for help. We need to accept His position of authority and our need of help. We never need to fear going to Him because He knows and understands; He’s been through it all but never gave in.

So why do we have times of need? I think it’s for a couple of reasons. First, we live in a fallen world and have to live with ourselves and others who have fallen natures. Second, if we never had times of need, we would never have found Jesus or continued needing Him. And a life without Jesus isn’t much of a life once we’ve met Him.

So what is Jesus doing now—right now? Whatever He needs to be doing so we can have a closer walk with Him and His Father. Does that mean He want us to be uncomfortable? No, He wants us to walk by faith and dependence on Him because He knows that this is what is best for us. So what is Jesus doing for you—right now?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 8:7-13

"I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts."

Are you as amazed as I am that God tweaked His own plan? He started off taking the Israelites by the hand and leading them out of Egypt, but the house of Israel wouldn't remain faithful, so He turned away. Can you imagine how much it must have broken His heart when the nation He created wouldn't trust and follow Him after all He had done and how He had proven Himself? I would have written them off. I would have written me off.

But God. Those wonderful words have such a promise behind them. But God came up with a new plan that was more powerful. Instead of having His laws written on stone and paper that had to be read, learned, understood, researched, subject to misinterpretation, and remembered, God decided to put His laws in our minds and write them on our hearts. What was important to Him would become part of us. It would determine how we think and what we feel.

How could this happen?

God says He will be our God and we will be His people. He says that no longer will one man teach another because all will know Him, from the least to the greatest. We'll just be one beggar telling another where to find bread (a Ron Ritchie phrase). God says that He will forgive our wickedness and remember our sins no more.

How could this happen?

It happened because Jesus became our perfect high priest. He offered a final sacrifice that dealt with our sin issue forever. His powerful resurrection life is available to each of us through the Spirit of God. Because Jesus is available to make His home within each of us if we'll let Him be in charge, He puts His laws in our minds and writes them on our hearts. We're able to think His thoughts after Him and care for what He cares about. Jesus is the high priest of this new covenant, this new arrangement.

Are you living this new covenant, or are you still trying to be good enough to be acceptable? Even the old covenant wasn't meant to be lived that way. But we can easily mess up the life He's made available if we don't let Jesus be Jesus in our lives.

What difference would living this way mean to you today?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 9:1-10

“But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance . . . the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshipper.”

As a wife and mom, it seems like one of my main duties is to provide meals for my family. Day in and day out I have to think about what’s available, what I need to buy, and what we’re going to have for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Men, do you feel this way about yard work?

I wonder if the priests ever felt this way, always offering gifts and sacrifices on behalf of their fellow countrymen and women, but knowing that what they did wasn’t enough since the high priest still had to offer a sacrifice once a year for sins committed in ignorance. Little did they know that they were setting the stage for Jesus being our high priest, and that when He came, the need for their sacrifices would disappear.

I think it’s fascinating that way back in Moses’ time God set in place a system for forgiving sins done in ignorance—like when you don’t know that you can’t turn right on a red arrow (at least in Georgia). Ignorance won’t keep us from a traffic ticket. Think of all we say and do that we think might be okay but could devastate another—or what we should have said or done. National and state laws are passed every year that we’re not told about but are subject to. God started making provisions for these situations over 3,000 year ago when He gave His law to Moses.

Thank you, Lord!

Think of the times when we do own up to what we’ve done (or not done), but our conscience still isn’t clear. We remember and feel awful. We replay these mental tapes even though we’ve changed the direction of our lives. The writer of this letter tells us that Jesus’ ministry in the heavenly temple is able to clear the conscience of the worshipper.

Thank you, Lord!

So what are our take-aways today? One possibility is to grow in our knowledge of what God expects because He provides the power and ability to live up to His standards. And when we’re living as He wants us to, the chance of hurting another out of ignorance diminishes.

Thank you, Lord!

Another take-away could be for those times when our memory starts to replay tapes. Instead of hitting Replay, we’re to press Delete and review instead what Jesus did for us on the cross and how He didn’t stay dead. Which button we press is up to us; the power to *do* belongs to Him.

Thank you, Lord! Which button are you going to push today?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 9:11-28

“In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”

As I read through this section I kept saying to myself, “But we’ve already talked about this.” However, one point I realized we hadn’t talked about was *why the blood?*

Shedding of blood started back at the Garden when God provided skins for Adam and Eve so they could cover themselves after they made a choice without consulting Him and opposite to His instructions.

Shedding of blood was part of the patriarchs’ relationship with God. Whenever something significant happened or when they turned back to God, they built an altar and, we assume, sacrificed an animal. Shedding of blood is foundational to the laws and statutes God gave Moses for the nation of Israel.

Seems like God was preparing the nation (and us) to understand why Jesus’ blood had to be shed, why He had to be sacrificed.

What if a death wasn’t required? What would that say about the horribleness of sin and the wonderfulness of God? Without a sacrifice being required, I think sin would be just an *oops* to laugh about and forget. We’d never acknowledge the death it brings in the doer’s life or in the lives of those affected. In fact, we’d probably try to believe that our lapses in judgment don’t affect anyone else. Humility would never be the hallmark of a mature person, and God would become like one of us rather than be set apart and worthy of honor and worship. His love wouldn’t woo us, and His forgiveness would be something we could put on a back burner.

So sin is sin, and God is God. And the only way a perfect God could accept us with all of our sin and our sin nature is for blood to be shed by a perfect sacrifice. Jesus took our place when His sacrifice was accepted by God, and so we became acceptable. Period. No if’s, and’s, or but’s. Jesus entered heaven itself and appeared *for us* in God’s presence. He did away with sin by sacrificing Himself. And He brings—and will bring—salvation to those who are waiting for Him.

Going back to our question of *why the blood*, the blood is our confidence that God loves us, accepts us, and will work through us for His sake. We’re not responsible to make ourselves good enough; only Jesus can make us acceptable in our actions, words, thoughts, and consciences. Now aren’t you thankful for the blood?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 10:1-18

“The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming . . . because by one sacrifice [Christ] has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”

What I know is what is real. Is this how you tend to think? All too often my answer would be yes. What I see, hear, and feel is what is real. But is it? At work last week a contractor who works for us in another state said he couldn't make copies or name tags for a presentation he was hosting. We all thought that he *should* have been responsible and made arrangements for having this work done. Our boss was unavailable, so we copied and shipped. In our staff meeting this week, we asked our boss about it and found out that the contractor had asked for our help for this first presentation because he had just started using office space in a CPA firm and the first quarter of the year was crazy. Amazing how having this additional information calmed us down and put life into perspective.

How does this example fit in with today's section? Well, think of the Jewish audience our author was writing to: they had known the law and the need for sacrifices for 2,000 years. It was their reality. And then they hear that the law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. Easy to comprehend and accept? No way.

So how does our author prove to them that what he's saying is true? He does so by comparing the activity of the priests with Jesus. Day after day the priests stood and performed their religious duties; the sacrifices were effective for that day but had to be repeated because the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin. A note in my Bible mentions that Jewish priests never sat down and that in fact the tabernacle and the temple didn't even have seats.

But Jesus, after offering Himself as the sacrifice and having it be accepted, “*sat down at the right hand of God* [place of honor],” waiting for His enemies to be made his footstool. In His one sacrifice He made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

The dilemma of the readers of this letter was to choose between what they knew and were comfortable with and what was better but new.

How do you respond when confronted with a new—and better—way of living from God? Will you choose to walk by faith or only by what you can see and have known?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 10:19-25

“Since we have . . . let us . . . let us . . . let us . . . let us . . . let us . . .”

From time to time I’ve wondered how we are to live as followers of Jesus. Have you wondered about this? Today we discover some answers through these *let us* statements.

The writer of this letter to Jewish believers has explained the foundation of our confidence to enter the Most Holy Place whenever we want. Because of Jesus, a whole new perfect game plan is in place; it will never let us down since it’s based on Him and what He’s done, not on our abilities *to do*. Ready to see this new game plan?

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience, having our bodies washed with pure water.

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

Let us consider how we can spur one another on toward love, toward good deeds.

Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing.

Let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the Day [end of time when Jesus returns] approaching.

What do you see in this list? Do you see a progression of ideas, a building of beliefs and actions?

I see the writer of this letter beginning with individual believers and their walk with God. They have sincere hearts (rather than mixed motives) that are grounded in faith. Their hearts have been and are continuing to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus so they don’t operate out of guilt, insecurity, or fear. Their bodies have been and are continuing to be washed with the pure water of baptism—being placed in Jesus—so that overt sexuality, greed, anger, and jealousy are washed away and replaced by purity and modesty, generosity and contentment, kindness and gentleness, and confidence in Jesus.

From this foundation—that needs to be deepened and strengthened as we walk in faith since it’s not a one-time event—we’re free to hold to the hope we profess without swerving. Only at this point can we spur (not prod) each other on, meet together for each other’s benefit, and encourage each other. Otherwise, we’re only talking *at* people, which makes us feel important but doesn’t benefit them. Where are you in this process? I need to go back to the first *let us* and deepen my foundation. Want to join me?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 10:26-31

“If we keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.”

Is this the same God we’ve been talking about, the one who has provided a way and wants us to draw near? Today’s God is the one we’re afraid of; the other God is the one we love and want to follow. How do we reconcile the two?

I think the truth behind today’s side of God reminds me that we have to make a choice about what the God of love actually offers. We can’t continue waffling; we have to make a decision. Knowing what will happen if we choose *not* to accept what He offers helps us choose wisely.

These Jewish Christians could quickly grasp today’s God because they knew the history of the Old Testament. They knew what had happened to those who had rejected the law of Moses through Israel’s history and so could understand what would happen if they rejected His Son, Jesus Christ.

So what can we learn from this paragraph that can prompt us (!) to walk by faith? I think we start by understanding the importance God places on what His Son did for us. For if we don’t accept what Jesus has done:

- It’s as though we’re trampling the Son of God under our feet.
- It’s as though we dismiss the blood that Jesus spilt so we could continue to be made acceptable to God.

Have you ever had someone not appreciate or value something you’ve done for his or her benefit? If you’re a parent, you know what I’m talking about. If you’re an adult child caring for an older parent, you know what I’m talking about. If you’re an employer or employee, you know what I’m talking about. If you’re a husband or a wife,

“It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Let’s take His offer seriously today and tomorrow and the next day. While an initial decision to follow Jesus does have to be made, daily decisions also have to be made until the day we die and can run into His loving arms.

It’s easy to get caught up in the dailyness of life, isn’t it? But if refusing to think takes us down a road we really don’t want, let’s choose the hard road now. So what would this new road look like for you today?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 10:32-39

“You” x 14

Did you notice the number of times the words *you* and *your* were used in this section? I counted 14 times out of 162 words, or 8% of the time. This section gives us a good look at the lives of these Jewish believers who were reading this letter. They hadn't just dipped their big toes into a life of faith in Jesus Christ; they had already gone through a lot! But now pressure was coming from Rome, and they were wondering if following Jesus was worth the effort. Let's look at what they had already experienced:

1. They had received the light.
2. They had stood their ground in a great contest in the face of suffering.
3. They had been publicly exposed to insult and persecution.
4. They had stood side by side with others who had been publicly exposed to insult and persecution.
5. They had sympathized with those in prison [for their faith].
6. They had joyfully accepted the confiscation of their property because they knew that they had better and lasting possessions.

Because of what they've already endured for the sake of following Jesus, the writer of this letter challenges them to:

- *Not throw away* their confidence for it will be richly rewarded.
- *Persevere* so that when they continue to do the will of God they will receive what He has promised.
- *Be righteous* because of living by faith.
- *Not shrink back* and so know God's pleasure.

What are you seeing for yourself in this section? Are you tempted to give up your faith? Is it hard to keep going? Are the difficulties—or blahness—of life starting to take over? I think this struggle to keep going with Jesus challenges us all. It's easy to start out strong but hard to finish well if we haven't lived the intervening years well. How do we do it? *We remember*. Remember who God is, what He's done, and what we've already endured. Then we make decisions for the future and work the plan. We're not to throw away our confidence or shrink back, or we'll be destroyed. We're to join those who remember, believe, and persevere. Why? Because our mutual encouragement will help all to enjoy God's pleasure and be saved. The choice is to run from conflict now or have a life with God forever.

What choice are you going to make today?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 11:1-2

"[Faith] is what the ancients were commended for."

I've loved reading this chapter in Hebrews because we're given real life examples of how others lived by faith and how God responded to them. These are the heroes of the Old Testament with whom we get to spend eternity. Whenever I start to feel down or that I'm being put upon, these men and women encourage me to continue.

Today, however, we're going to put this chapter and list of heroes in context. This chapter wasn't added to be read on its own; it's part of the ongoing reasoning the writer of this letter used to encourage these Jewish believers to continue in their faith. While you or I may have to take the time to learn about these men and women, the original readers would have grown up knowing their stories.

So what is faith?

We're told that faith is being sure of what we hope for. This *hoping for* isn't like what we tend to hope for. As a single woman, I used to hope that a certain man would call for a date. As a mom of teenagers, I used to hope that my sons would make it home safe and sober. As a mother-in-law, I hope that my sons will love their wives as their father loves me. As a grandmother, I hope that my grandchildren will make wise decisions that will keep them from the scars of life.

It's all too easy to translate this *maybe* hope to God: if He says we'll have a life with Him forever, maybe we won't; if He says we can trust Him for the future, maybe we can't; if He says He'll be our protector, maybe He won't be because bad things do happen to good people. If He says He can bring good out of bad and life out of death, maybe He can't. *But the cross says He can and He will.*

We're told to be certain of what we can't see but what God says is true. What we can't see includes the heavenly hosts and what God is going to do next year, tomorrow, or later on today. We need to leave room in our thinking for God to act and then count on His acting, even if we can't see it—ever. This is how our heroes lived: they were certain that God was going to do what He promised, even if they never saw it. This is how Jesus was able to go to the cross. *This is what pleases God.*

Want to feel God's pleasure? Walk by faith today, regardless of *whatever* is going on in your life. The choice is faith OR fear, worry, anger, and hopelessness. How are you going to walk today?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 11:3

“By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”

You know, I’ve always skimmed over this verse on my way to the next one and never really looked at it. You too? In no way am I a scientist or even interested in science. My bent is more toward the humanities and politics. So when it comes to creation, all I know is what Scripture has told me. In my simple thinking, since God was there and mankind wasn’t, I’ll take what God says. So what has He told us?

In Genesis 1:1-2, we’re told that God created the heavens and the earth [so where was God before?]. After He created the earth, it was formless and empty, and darkness was over the surface of the deep. The Spirit of God hovered over the waters. Then, God said and order, distinctions, systems, and life happened—out of nothing.

Job and his friends tried to fathom the mind and actions of God. Finally God Himself speaks, challenges Job to brace himself like a man, and says, “Where were you when I” (Job 38-47)

Paul writes to the Corinthians that the same God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness [a physical impossibility I’m told] also made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:6)

So God wasn’t just working in the physical and animal world; His end game was to make Himself known to mankind—to you and me.

So now back to Hebrews 11. We read that God created the universe with a word, a command. He didn’t have to raise a finger or work up a sweat. He spoke, and it was. (We know how hard this is because we try it with our kids.) At His word, the visible was made out of the invisible, supporting what we saw yesterday about faith. We’re told to be certain of what we hope for and have confidence in. If our hope is in God and He created the universe with a word, nothing is too hard for him. We’re to be certain of what we do not see. Well, if God could create the universe out of what couldn’t be seen, what do you think He has hidden for us, ready to be seen at the right time?

Why don’t you write down what you think is impossible for God to fix and ask Him what He wants to do about it? Then trust God for how He wants to handle the future and follow His lead for today. Please, don’t leave today without *writing, leaving, and following*.

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 11:4

“And by faith [Abel] still speaks, even though he is dead.”

Let's review what we know about Abel from today's verse and from Genesis 4:

- Abel was second born and kept flocks.
- When bringing an offering to God, Cain brought *some of the fruits* of the soil, but Abel brought fat portions from the first born of the flock.
- Abel offered his sacrifice by faith, and God called it *better*.
- God looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but not so with Cain and his offering.
- Abel is commended as righteous because of his faith in action.
- Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.

While I don't know if what the brothers offered was important to God (crops or animal sacrifice) since both became offerings in Jewish tradition, I do have some musings:

1. Since God had sacrificed an animal to prepare the skins to cover Adam and Eve after they had sinned and were sent from the Garden, the sons knew about animal sacrifice.
2. Cain would have had to ask his younger brother for an animal, and what older sibling wants to be in debt to a younger one?

Regardless of what the brothers brought, I think that if God hadn't liked Abel's offering, Abel would have figured out what he could do differently. Cain, however, erupted in jealous anger, defensiveness, and finally fear as He learned about God's consequences. Never did he humble himself and ask for forgiveness. His short fuse was lit, and he exploded.

Maybe that's the point of today's verse. God knows what's just underneath the surface of our spiritual veneer, and He'll arrange life to let us see and experience what He's seen and known all along. How we've been living determines our response.

Are some memories coming to mind of times when you've exploded? Mine happened two days ago. Either I can rationalize my response or humble myself. The choice is mine, and the right choice isn't easy to make. How about you? Are you also living the results of your choices like Cain did? The *better* sacrifice means we don't hold tightly onto what's most valuable to us. But with Jesus, life comes out of death. Is Abel becoming your hero?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 11:5-6

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

Have you met Enoch before? He’s a 6th generation grandson of Adam and Eve who is listed in Genesis 5. If you haven’t read this chapter in a while, I encourage you to do so now. So what do you know about Enoch? You’re right, his son was Methuselah—the oldest man who ever lived. I’ve been told that Methuselah’s name means *when he dies the rain will come*, but rain wasn’t known at that time. Methuselah’s grandson was Noah (remember the ark?) when the rain came and came and came.

We also read in Genesis 5 that Enoch walked with God for 300 years, and then he wasn’t around anymore—no one could find him—because God took him. Enoch is one of two men in the Old Testament who didn’t have to endure death (the other is Elijah). I’ve heard it said that on one of their long walks together, they walked so far that it would be well past dark when they got back to Enoch’s home, so God invited him to come home with Him. I assume his wife and children went searching for him since the writer of Hebrews tells us that Enoch couldn’t be found, but I wonder if they quickly figured out what had happened because they knew about his close relationship with God?

So how could Enoch have such a close relationship with God that he didn’t have to suffer with death? He didn’t have the Old Testament to read or know the history of the Israelites. What did Enoch know about God that prompted such a life? What had he learned from his granddads going back to Adam?

Enoch knew and believed that God existed and that He rewards those who *earnestly* seek Him. (emphasis added) *Do you?* Some believe that God exists but are waiting for the other shoe to drop. *Do you?* Some go to church on Sundays (most of the time) and may even attend a Bible study or small group and think that is enough. *Do you?*

So how do we *earnestly* seek God? How do we look for His face and His hand in every situation—whether it seems good or bad—and know that He’ll reward us with His presence, His peace, and His strength to walk with Him *in* the situation?

Enoch’s kind of faith so pleased God that Enoch didn’t have to die. Jesus’ kind of faith so pleased His Father that His sacrifice for us was accepted.

This kind of faith always pleases God. Is it your kind of faith?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 11:7

“Holy fear”

Have you read the story of Noah recently? If not, you may want to reread Genesis 5:28-9:28. So what do we know about Noah?

1. Noah is first one to get specific directions from God: build an ark and collect the animals.
2. Noah knew he had been given a warning but didn't know exactly what was going to happen. He *may* have known about rain, but he didn't know that God would destroy all life by having the springs of the great deep burst forth and the flood gates of the heavens open.
3. Noah, his family, the animals, and the birds lived on the ark for more than a year.
4. Noah, his family, the animals, and the birds lived while everyone and everything else was destroyed.
5. By his faith, Noah becomes heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. An heir is someone who inherits something when another dies and leaves what is valuable.

You may think that God has never warned you about things not yet seen; that was my initial thought. But consider what can happen if we don't:

- Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry (James 1:19)
- Consider it all joy when we face trials (James 1:2)
- Submit ourselves to every authority under heaven (1 Peter 2:13)
- Be above reproach and worthy of respect (1 Timothy 3:2, 8)
- Pray without anger or disputing (1 Timothy 2:8)
- Dress modestly, with decency and propriety (1 Timothy 2:9)
- Learn in quietness and full submission (1 Timothy 2:11)

We don't always know why God wants us to follow these commands or what He plans to do; He just asks us to trust Him and obey in *holy fear*—*holy* because we respect who He is as God and *fear* because He's in control and we're better off if we follow Him instead of going our own way. We do what He says and then share in what He does through our obedience.

What is God asking you to do today? Be sure it doesn't conflict with Scripture, or you may be just listening to your own desires. Noah was probably mocked by his neighbors as he gathered wood and built the boat, but then the animals came and the rain started. Was Noah glad he obeyed when he heard? You bet. Will you be glad when God acts? You bet!

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 11:8-10

“For he was looking forward . . .”

Why do we obey God and do what He says? I think our answer should be because He deserves to be obeyed. But as I was looking at today’s section, I began to think that our obedience actually starts with selfishly *wanting* what God says is available if we do follow Him.

God told Abraham to leave his home and go to a place that would later become his inheritance. Something in this promise was so enticing to Abraham that he was willing to leave all that was familiar and predictable. In fact he went to this foreign land as a stranger and made his home there, settling in for the long haul. In this new land he and his sons and their sons lived as the inhabitants lived—in tents as nomads. But they made their homes there instead of living apart as visitors who are always ready to return home.

And why did Abraham (and Isaac and Jacob) live this way instead of going *home*. Because he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (v.10) Somehow Abraham understood that this world is not our home and that we are to look forward to living in God’s city that will last beyond death and destruction. Living in that future and eternal city requires that we fully live here wherever God places us. It also means that we learn to live how He’s called us to live with others who are following Him, with those who aren’t following Him yet, and with the forces and lies that bombard us every day.

I don’t know if you’re being challenged with this truth, but I am! We moved to Georgia a little over nine years ago, but today I realized that I haven’t let my heart settle in with those I’m around. I’ve kept my heart aloof and spiritualized the reasons why. But today’s truth has stripped away my rationalizations. God called us here, and here needs to be my home because I’m looking forward to the city God has built. I’m not sure how this truth will work out, but I know I need to change my thinking.

Are you where God has called you? Have you been rationalizing your behavior to keep yourself safe and comfortable, or are you settling in and getting involved? What response is God asking you to make today?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 11:11-12

“By faith Abraham, even though he was . . .”

How do you respond when you read in Scripture about how we're to be, when someone challenges you to be more than you've been, or when you hear of someone who has walked out in faith and amazing things have happened? I think most of us say (or at least think), “That's great for someone else, but I'm . . .”

Let's take a look at Abraham. He was a man of great courage, but he also listened to his wife when he shouldn't have. He put his wife in danger when he felt threatened and also allowed Hagar and her son to make life miserable for his wife and their son. Abraham was a man with inner insecurities that deeply hurt those close to him. But God chose Abraham to have a significant place in world history, and millions have been blessed because of him. Wouldn't you like that to be said of you? I do.

So what was different about Abraham? What can we learn from him? The writer of this letter tells us that when God made a promise to him, Abraham looked squarely at the realities: he knew that he was too old to father a child, that his wife had never been able to have children, and that she was well into menopause.

But Abraham also looked at the One who had made the promise and considered this One faithful to do what He said, no matter what. What does *consider* mean to you; is it a maybe thing based on circumstances? When Abraham *considered*, he chose to believe in unseen realities that were more real to him than the here and now because he knew the One behind these realities.

And what did God do? He *enabled* Abraham to become a father. God worked in spite of the circumstances because this is what He does.

And this enabling changed the course of history.

Is God asking you to *consider* Him faithful in a situation? Have you thought about what hangs in the balance? Abraham had no idea of the importance of his decision and neither do we. But I promise you, your choice will affect you, those around you, and those coming after you who may not even be born yet.

So what decisions are you facing today?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 11:13-16

“Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”

Did you know that God isn't ashamed to be associated with us? In fact, He's quite proud to be called *our* God, so proud that He's created a city just for us. I don't know your background, but I know mine—and I also know what I've done while following Jesus—but still God isn't ashamed to be called our God, my God.

Today's verse begins with the word *therefore*, so we need to know what our part in the relationship is for God to want to be associated with us. Following the examples of Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham who fully lived where they were, here's how we need to be:

- Still living by faith until the day we die
- Living without receiving what has been promised; seeing it and welcoming it from a distance
- Living as aliens and strangers on earth rather than becoming entrenched and comfortable because we know where we've come from and where we're going—and we're willing to tell others about our destination
- Looking for a country of our own that we'll find when we die to this life
- Longing for this better country—a heavenly one—while on earth

What keeps us from living this way? For me it's the comfortableness and isolation from the realities of life. Where I live and how I live keeps me insulated from much of life's problems and cares. But God has been opening my eyes and my heart to the heartaches of others.

Maybe you're well aware of what's going on in the seamy side of life. If so, perhaps you need to open your eyes to what is to come for those who walk by faith instead of just keeping your eyes on the here and now.

I think all of us live in the extremes of thinking—being isolated or too aware—when it comes to today's topic. Where are you on the spectrum? Do you get aggravated with those on the other end? They probably get aggravated with you. Only God can balance us so we have an eternal perspective while living here with those God has put around us.

How could God want to balance you?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 11:17-19

“ . . . when God tested him . . . ”

As I began reading today's section, I couldn't help but wonder why we were still reading about Abraham after yesterday's encouraging conclusion. Then I read today's verse about God testing Abraham. After years of Abraham's walking by faith, this test came in a series of circumstances that could cause any man or woman to give up and walk by what is seen or felt.

How are you walking today? Which words describe you: *persevere* and *endure* or *losing heart*? It seems like the words we use to describe our emotions reflect what's in our hearts. In the notes of my Bible the editor wrote:

Faith resembles a difficult race. The runner has his eyes on the winners prize, and despite temptations to slacken the pace, he refuses to let up until he crosses the finish line. The faith described in Hebrews is not sugar coated and does not guarantee a life of luxury and ease. It is tough faith: a constant commitment to hang on and believe God against all odds, no matter what.

So how did this test play out in Abraham's life?

1. God promises.
2. God provides the way for the promise to happen (Isaac) and waits.
3. God asks for Abraham to give back this promise.
4. God supernaturally provides so His promise can really be fulfilled.

I wonder if this whole test was more for Isaac's benefit than Abraham's. He had grown up knowing he was the means to the promise—a pretty heady thought for a teenager. When he realized that his father was more committed to following God than protecting him, I can only imagine the thoughts that must have swirled around in his head. But then God provided the sacrifice at just the right moment. I bet God got Isaac's full attention and began working with him and his faith just as He had with Abraham. The mantle of leadership was being passed on.

Are you a parent of an older child? If so, have you found it hard to pass on the parenting of that son or daughter to God? We do the best we can when they're young, but ultimately God needs to take over. Either we follow God regardless of what He seems to be doing or we hold onto the parent role past its time. As parents we can only let go if we've come to trust God over years of living with Him. Are you the father or the son in today's story, and how are you responding to the test?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 11:20-22

“Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.”

Half of the book of Genesis—25 of the 50 chapters—covers the lives of these three men, but the writer of Hebrews gives them one verse each. They lived and loved, but when it came to walking by faith, God chose to focus on one or two points for each man. What do you think He'd say about you?

Isaac blessed his two sons in regard to their future. Esau was the older and so should have received most of the blessing. Jacob and his mother tricked Isaac through his failing eyesight, but God didn't intervene, so the younger son got the blessing due to his older brother. (Genesis 27)

Jacob blessed Joseph's two sons in regard to their future and took them as his own (wonder how Joseph felt about this?). Joseph arranged his sons for how he wanted them to be blessed, but Jacob crossed his arms and gave the younger son the blessing due to the older son—again failing eyesight. God didn't intervene this time either. (Genesis 42)

Jacob leaned on the top of his staff when he worshipped. Why couldn't he stand up straight? Years after tricking Esau and then was tricked by Laban (his father-in-law and his mother's brother), Jacob leaves Laban and takes his family back home, knowing he has to face his brother. Along the way God meets up with him, and they have a wrestling match in the middle of the night. Jacob is such a fighter that the only way *the man* could win was to touch the socket of Jacob's hip and disable him. From then on Jacob limped and worshipped. (Genesis 32)

Joseph, when he was dying, spoke to his brothers about God taking them out of Egypt and made them promise to take his bones with them so he would be with his family and not stay in Egypt forever. The exodus of the nation of more than 1 million happened 400 years later after being slaves there, and Joseph's bones went with them. (Exodus 13:19)

What do we learn from these three men and their stories? I see that I don't need to worry about man's conniving (or mine) because God is in charge and is not bound by our decisions. I see that family weaknesses run strong through generations and our only hope is for God to intervene and break the trend like he broke Jacob's hip when they wrestled. I see that wrestling with God is inevitable if we refuse to humble ourselves and learn from our experiences. I see that our sight is limited while God's is clear and true. I see that it's better to stay with God's people than be comfortable.

What do you see?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 11:23-29

faith or fear?

I've often heard that faith is the antidote to fear. But when I look at our heroes in Scripture, I tend to think of them as special people because God chose them to work through them—until today when I read today's passage.

Today we read about Moses' parents—an unnamed, ordinary couple. Along with other Israelites, they had learned about God from the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their own faith in God was strong and deep. (Exodus 1 & 2) When Pharaoh commanded the death of all Hebrew baby boys, the midwives and Moses' mother didn't comply because they knew that God was trustworthy and so weren't afraid of any king's edict.

Somehow while living in Pharaoh's home, Moses learned this lesson as well and chose to align himself with God's people who lived in slavery rather than seek the treasures of Egypt for short-term pleasures. While Moses initially fled from Egypt in fear of his life (Exodus 2:14), he fled to God who gave him a new life. God began teaching him to not fear the Pharaoh's anger by showing "*him who is invisible*" in the only burning bush that hasn't burned up. (Exodus 3)

By faith Moses learned that God is more powerful than the Egyptian gods represented by the plagues. In response he followed God's strange command to sacrifice a perfect lamb and spread the blood over the doorpost so the angel of God could pass over these protected homes but kill the first born of homes without belief. (Exodus 12) *By faith* the people followed Moses through the parted Red Sea as on dry land. (Exodus 14) They began to fear when they looked at the Egyptian army chasing them, but Moses told them to turn around and look at God instead.

It's so easy to let fear control our thinking and our lives, isn't it? In this world there is much to fear: leaders who seem to care more about their own interests than those who elected them to serve, home-grown terrorists, drugs and their results, domestic abuse, murders and robberies, home invasions, losing a job, cancer, car accidents, and natural disasters. I guess the issue is, *what do we look at?* Do we keep our eyes on what could happen or on the One who loves us, who is in control, and who has power over our souls for eternity? While many of us *will* have to go through horribly tough times, will we be like Moses who looked ahead to his reward, seeing Him who is invisible?

We never know what hangs in the balance when we choose faith over fear. If his parents had given into fear, Moses wouldn't have been ready to lead his people into freedom. Who will be freed by your faith, even today?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 11:30-31

“the walls of Jericho fell . . . Rahab was not killed”

I've often thought it would be fun to write a book on the battle plans in the Old Testament, and at the top of the list would have to be the battle for Jericho. I've heard that one battle to free Israel in 1947 was won because the British commander knew the Old Testament battles that had happened in that spot. But God never seems to use the same battle plan twice. Why? I think it's because He wants us to follow Him rather than do what we think is best based on what we see or know.

In today's case, a generation of Hebrews had been born while in the wilderness following the cloud of smoke during the day and the pillar of fire at night. Their parents had been slaves in Egypt—without the structure of a government or knowledge of how a military should function. The leadership had just changed from Moses to Joshua. They were in a state of change, but God knew what He was doing. Does this sound like you? Then maybe the faith of those who walked around Jericho for seven days without knowing why will encourage you.

And then there's Rahab. You'll probably want to read Joshua 2 and Joshua 6:15-25 for background on Rahab and her faith in action.

Everyone in Jericho had the same information about the Hebrews and the God they followed. For some reason, however, Rahab softened her heart toward this God and those He protected. Maybe it was because as a prostitute she was at the beck and call of others and so longed to be protected. The two spies found their way to her. How? God was involved. The king knew her and sent soldiers to her for information about the spies—if anyone knew anything, it would be Rahab. So here's a woman who knows the king, but because she wants to protect her family, she negotiates with the spies. Joshua values her and so protects her. This may be the first time she's ever been protected by a man; no wonder she wants to align herself with the Hebrews.

So we have Rahab who has watched, listened, evaluated, and decided to follow God—whatever the cost—and ends up being in the lineage of Jesus Christ. (Matthew 1).

What's the opposite way of living? I think it's being someone who reacts but doesn't think. Does this describe you? We never know the end result of our choices—but God does. Time to *watch, listen, evaluate, and decide* to follow God, whatever the cost?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 11:32-38

“The world was not worthy of them.”

I love the first half of this paragraph but need the last half. I love these heroes' faith when they make hard choices and see God come through. How exciting. How encouraging. Do you know these stories? Gideon is in Judges 6-8. Barak was Deborah's general in Judges 4-5. Samson is in Judges 13-16. Jephthah is in Judges 10-12. (Judges were military leaders between Joshua and King Saul.) David is in 1 Samuel 16:3, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings 1-2, and most of Psalms. Samuel is in 1 & 2 Samuel.

But what about the times God doesn't seem to answer or show up? A few years ago a woman I knew who loved the Lord was violently raped and killed while biking. He was caught and recently found guilty and sentenced to die. But her husband, her adult children, friends, and family miss her and were sickened as they heard again at the trial what she went through in the last minutes of her life. Where was God? Why didn't He intervene? These are the questions we all ask when confronted with such evil and anger. And she wasn't even attacked because of her faith; he was just a sick man who was off his meds and kept giving himself over to evil.

And what about those who are listed in today's paragraph who are nameless? They were tortured but *refused* to be released. Some were flogged or chained and put in prison. Others were stoned, sawed in two, and killed by the sword. Some were poor, destitute, persecuted, and mistreated. While others wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and holes in the ground. All because of their faith.

What has your faith cost you? I've only experienced loss of a job, a breakup with a guy I was dating, and some jeering.

But God (those wonderful words) says that the world was not worthy of such amazing men and women. He knows those He can trust to endure such treatment, and I think He's honoring them in heaven. Did He send an angel to them as they were dying as we saw in the TV show *Touched by an Angel*? Out of His great love for them, probably. Regardless, I'm sure He prepared them to face such situations with dignity and single-mindedness. Did it change those who were killing them? Maybe. Does it change us? Hopefully.

If you knew you'd be facing any horror (because some of us probably will), how would you want to live *now* to be ready for *then*? Regardless of our future, may our gravestones read, *“The world was not worthy of them.”*

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 11:39-40

“God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”

Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephtheh, David, Samuel, and the prophets.

If you were one of these heroes of the Old Testament and you had the choice of being commended in this life for your faith for all time and for the benefit of others OR receive what had been promised when you meet Jesus, which would you choose?

Few of us have the maturity to continually do what’s right with only the promise of a reward, but our heroes did. They lived before Jesus came, died on the cross, and was resurrected. They lived for their *now*, not realizing how their choices were going to unfold for future generations.

But look at what the writer of this letter says, *“God had planned something better for us [you, me, all of us since the cross], so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”* I think that we can be made perfect too. I think Jesus made perfection possible at the cross when His Father accepted His sacrifice. I think the power to be perfect was made available to us when the Spirit came to the believers in Acts 2 and united them into the body of Christ rather than having them act independently of each other. I think this power to be perfect is made available to all of us when we accept Jesus as Lord and Savior and the Spirit makes His home in us.

But I don’t think being made perfect means never making a mistake. In God’s mind I think being made perfect is our acting in faith that comes from humility and dependence. This faith is what our heroes pictured for us as they trusted God instead of depending on themselves and their own ability to figure out their situations. It’s who they were, not what they did.

What does this mean for us? The last three chapters of this letter contain 25 commands of how we are to live because of Jesus’ life in us through the work of the Spirit. If we want to be made perfect with our heroes, we will be living out these commands with His strength today.

Who are your heroes? Are you becoming a hero for the next generation of believers?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 12:1-3

“Since we are . . . let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that entangles . . . let us run with endurance, let us fix our eyes on Jesus.”

Do you ever wonder what the Old Testament stories have to do with us? I think the writer of this letter is telling us that the Old Testament is for our encouragement. His readers had been thinking that Jesus would return soon so that all of their troubles were to be short-lived. But they were facing increased persecution and, like all of us, their faith was weakening under the pressure, and they were tempted to give up. So the writer told them that they were in a marathon race, not a sprint, and the prize was worth the effort.

Were you expecting or hoping for a sprint and now find yourself facing a marathon? Are you ready to give up and walk away from the race? Do you feel like no one knows or understands? What encouragement do you need today? Let's see what our passage has for us.

Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses: All of our Old Testament heroes are watching and cheering us on, like crowds at a race. They know and understand because they made it to the end. We're not alone. Can you hear the roar of the crowd?

Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles: What hinders you in your faith walk, and what sin easily entangles you? *Throwing* it off sounds so easy; but it isn't! What would throwing off a sin look like for you? What would the benefits be?

Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us: Your race is marked out just for you like mine is for me. What does your race look like? Who marked it out? Does knowing that it's been set out just for you by God Himself make a difference?

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith: He endured the cross and opposition from sinful men that ranged from ignoring Him to killing Him. What are you fixing your eyes on: your job, family, what others are doing or not doing? How is your endurance? Are you being overwhelmed by opposition from others, growing weary, or losing heart?

Which of these four truths do you need today? What do you need to do differently or keep on doing? Remember, you're not in this alone; a cloud of witnesses is cheering you on, and Jesus Himself understands and is available for all that you need. Let us keep on keeping on, my friend!

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 12:4-13

“true sons”

I think this section has done more for me over the years in defining the relationship God wants to have with me than anywhere else in the Scriptures. While God *is* sitting on His throne, He wants me to think of Him and relate to Him as a Father the way He defines father. So what have I seen in and learned from this section over the years?

1. Hardship is discipline that God brings my way to *train* me for His ends
2. Illegitimate children are not disciplined (*trained*) by a father-figure; they are left to go their own way.
3. True sons (and daughters) are disciplined (*trained*) to prepare them for the future.
4. Discipline (*training*) isn't punishment; it has a positive goal for us.
5. God disciplines (*trains*) us for our good that we might share in His holiness.
6. Discipline (*training*) is painful at the time, but after it does its job, it produces in us a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

When God puts His finger on an area and I allow Him to show me what I'm really thinking and doing, humility flows in and righteousness and peace flow out. I know I'm loved because He cares enough to confront me in a way that I could hear Him. I know I'm loved because He doesn't want me to continue down the destructive road I was walking. I know I'm loved because He gives me His way of living, which is usually opposite of my selfish choices. I know I'm loved because I'm not being ignored; the God of the universe sees me, knows me, and is setting me on the path to being an adult in His kingdom and sharing in His holiness.

I so love the outcome of God's discipline that I'm asking Him for His input more frequently. I'm seeing hardship as His way of getting my attention so I'm not fighting Him so much.

How do you react to hardships? What do you do when God puts His holy finger on an area in your life? Do you want a harvest of righteousness and peace? Harvests come at the end of the growing season, not at the beginning or middle. *So how are we to be different than we were?* The writer of this letter says to strengthen feeble arms and weak knees and make level paths for our feet. Strengthening and leveling take time, effort, and training. The *how* we do this is tomorrow. Can't wait!

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 12:12-17

“Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.”

Yesterday we talked about strengthening ourselves and leveling out where we walk. But do you see *why* from today’s section? It’s not just for ourselves but also so others who are lame and weak may be healed instead of being further disabled. Our growth as believers allows others to be strengthened and healed as they interact with us. But if we refuse to change, they won’t have a chance.

How are we to change and grow? Let’s look at what the writer of Hebrews has for us.

Make every effort to live in peace with all men [and women]: What word do you want to emphasize in this command? Do you insist that others live in peace with you so you can stay as you are?

Make every effort to be holy; without holiness no one will see God: Does this mean perfect? I think it means owning up to what we do, say, and think that doesn’t agree with who God is and then choosing to go in the opposite direction.

See to it that no one misses the grace of God: Do you see the grace of God in your life in both the little and big areas? Do you share these breakthroughs with those close to you? Do you help others see the grace of God in their lives?

See to it that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many: Do you hold onto bitter thoughts and repeat them to yourself and anyone else who will listen? Oh my, I did this just this morning.

See that no one is sexually immoral: Women, how do you dress? Men, what do you look at and think about?

See to it that no one is godless like Esau: Of course we’re not responsible for other’s choices, but we can speak up when we see others going down the wrong road. Keep including God in your conversations and don’t sell out for a bowl of food.

If we just followed these six exhortations, we’d be doing well, but the writer of this letter goes on to make sure we know the God with whom we’re dealing. We’ll look at this tomorrow. Today has enough challenges of its own.

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 12:18-29

“a fiery mountain that can be touched” OR “Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem”?

As I read today’s section, I found myself having to remember the writer’s audience. He was writing to Jewish men and women who had become followers of Jesus Christ, but the Roman persecution was getting so intense for Christians that they were considering leaving Jesus and returning to Judaism. Fear and hard times can easily unsettle us, can’t they?

The writer of this letter reminds them of their past and the God they had known in Judaism. Look at the words he uses: a mountain burning with fire; darkness, gloom, and storm; demanding commands; terrifying; fearful (from when their fathers got the 10 Commandments). He then contrasts this image with the reality of a life with Christ by using these words:

- *Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God*
- *Thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly*
- *The church of the first born [us], whose names are written in heaven*
- *God, the judge of all men*
- *Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant [with God]*
- *The sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than Abel’s blood*

And if those who left Egypt couldn’t escape when they refused to listen to the warnings, there’s no way we can escape if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven. Then God’s words shook the earth, but He’s promised us at the end times to shake the earth and the heavens to remove created things. The writer told them that the kingdom of the One doing the shaking cannot be shaken. So which world do we want to be associated with—the one that will be removed through shaking (all our “toys”) or the one that can’t be shaken?

How do you think the men and women who read this letter responded? Did the threat of Rome’s persecution seem more real than the God who judges all? The writer told them to be thankful (rather than fearful) and so worship God in a way that pleases Him with reverence and awe because worship is a result of giving thanks. Hmmm He ended this section by reminding them that God is a consuming fire. Moses in Deuteronomy 4:24 adds that God is also jealous. He loves us and wants the best for us, which only comes when we trust and follow Him.

Which world are you counting on these days?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 13:1-21

"We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way."

Oh to be confident of having a clear conscience, as well as the *knowledge* and desire of how to live honorably in every way. This is the standard that the writer of this letter sets for us. You wonder why I added *knowledge* to today's verse? It's because of what he tells us in this section: he *knows* how to live honorably and shares this knowledge with us:

Keep on loving each other as brothers: Christian brothers ought to live in humility, respect, and deep-seated caring for each other's well-being because of their Father.

Entertain strangers: Don't just entertain those we know and are comfortable with and who can invite us to their homes because we never know God's outcome for these unexpected visits.

Remember those in prison: I think he's primarily thinking of believers who have been put in prison for their faith (Timothy was just released (v. 23)), but I love how prison ministries have sprung up to encourage us to love prisoners and their families.

Honor marriage and keep the marriage bed pure: Think of how much sex we see on TV, in movies, and on the internet. Think about jokes that are told and suggestive clothes that are sold. Are we supporting immorality or living lives that reflect our holy Father?

Keep lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have: Buy, buy, buy indicates insecurity and not feeling loved.

Remember your leaders whose lives live out what they preach, and imitate their faith: Their faith is an earthly picture of Jesus. Are your leaders in need? Help them, appreciate them, pray for them.

Watch what you hear and believe: Strange teachings will pop up all around us; our hearts need to be strengthened by God's grace, not by what we eat, feel, or hear.

Offer to God a sacrifice of praise: A sacrifice means death; we have to die to ourselves so we can praise God in the middle of hard times.

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority: You know what it's like when kids don't listen to parents; don't be that way with those God has put as authority figures in your life.

Pray for spiritual leaders: They need us to be praying for them.

God wants to equip us with everything we need for doing His will so He can work in and through us what is pleasing to Him. He's done everything that's necessary. The only unknown is us: will we follow Him or go our own way. It really boils down to humility, doesn't it? We can see Him as He is or try to box Him in. What's your choice today?

Walking With the Father Through Hebrews

Hebrews 13:22-25

“Grace be with you all.”

Can you believe that we’re at the end of this wonderful letter? It’s taken us a while, but we made it, and I know that I’m a different person—much more purposeful—because of it. How about you? So what do we get out of this final section? (I’m surprised that the writer calls it a “short letter.” I wonder what he thought a long letter would look like.)

- We see that Timothy’s been released—I assume from prison—and was on his way to where the writer was staying so he could get to where the readers of the letter were living.
- The readers have a number of spiritual leaders in their midst, as well as a number of believers. These leaders were the second generation of leadership rather than the original leaders who had been Jesus’ disciples.
- The writer has been writing from Italy and has been involved with the believers there.

My conclusion? Paul has been in Rome after his first arrest and was writing to Jewish believers who were scattered throughout the Roman Empire and were without strong spiritual leadership because most of the original Jewish leaders were in Jerusalem. Timothy had been in prison in Ephesus and was going to meet up with Paul. Am I right? Maybe. But my conclusions aren’t as important as the writer’s conclusions:

Jesus is superior to the angels, to Moses, to the priests Aaron and Melchizedek, and to Abraham. He’s worth following and depending on, regardless if we ever see the results of trusting Him.

But with all this knowledge, what is really important is that God’s grace—His resources—are available to us every day and in every situation. The writer of this letter wants us to know and experience this grace in every situation. It’s our choice. And when we choose to believe and trust, the angels and the heroes of chapter 11 cheer us on for our sake, the sake of all those who are watching, and because God is being honored.

Can you hear the roar of the crowd?
