

BETTER PROMISES: DAILY STUDY GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

I sit in a room filled with people anticipating the moment the letter will be delivered. Times have been tough lately and maybe, just maybe, what I will hear in a short moment will be just what I need. Because truly, this could be the end.

I look around the room and see faces of people I once knew as great friends but now may be something different. Tragedy and danger have a way of changing the way you look at the world, and I feel myself changing. And now no one is truly sure where they stand, even me.

The Romans are making it hard to be a follower. They blame the followers of “The Way” for all the misery happening in the nation, and now no believer is safe. What can be done? How does our community survive this?

The chatter has been disturbing, even borderline heretical. Is it possible that many of these people that I have trusted during these tumultuous times would consider turning their backs on everything we have believed and preached? But if I’m honest with myself, I am doubting as well. Doubting that following Jesus is truly the way. If following him is so hard, is it really worth it?

This letter could be the moment. This letter must be the moment. Because the tide has to turn or we will lose it all, I will lose it all. This message, this letter, to all of us Jewish believers, is where I will decide whether to continue the journey, or call it quits.

This could have been the thought process of a Jewish believer at the time the book of Hebrews was written and delivered. Persecution was prevalent against the followers of Christ and being a Christian was difficult. Many were considering going back to Judaism. And why not? It would be easier.

The author of the book of Hebrews (which scholars can’t agree on) makes the case to the Jewish believers to stay the course, to not turn back, and to hold strong in the face of opposition and persecution.

The author’s ultimate argument: What you want to go back to isn’t bad, but what Jesus gives you is BETTER! Don’t settle. In Jesus you have BETTER PROMISES.

As you go through this journey in Hebrews, we hope that message comes through for you loud and clear.

Milton Marquez
Campus Pastor
Crosswalk Point Loma

BETTER PROMISES: WEEK 1

WEEK 1: Mon (Hebrews 1:1-4)

Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe. The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven. This shows that the Son is far greater than the angels, just as the name God gave him is greater than their names.

It's non-stop communication. God has been speaking from the beginning of time. Genesis tells us God spoke the earth into existence and he hasn't stopped talking. If this is true (and I believe it is) then why does it seem that God seems silent at times.

We know that communication has a deliverer and a receiver. One speaks and the other hears. So God takes on the role of speaker and the hearers, you and me, seem to be deaf. So what is the problem? Who is the problem? God or us?

The author of Hebrews tells us that God spoke in the past through prophets. These were humans called on by God to deliver messages to his people. And I know that the term prophet carries spiritual heft but never forget that prophets in the end are still human. Humans that preach powerfully one moment, and run away scared the next moment. Do great miracles in the face of danger and then disobey God in a fit of anger.

And when these incidents happen, the message of God can get skewed. The clarity of God's love and mercy can get warped and His reputation takes a hit for those observing the inconsistency of the messenger and the message.

And we turn off our ears, plug into the world and ignore what God might be doing around us. We miss the messages that come from God from nature, our family and community, from church, and even our own hearts. So God had to do something about it.

So God decided to choose a new messenger, a better messenger. Someone whose life and speech would clearly communicate who God is and what God is like. Jesus, the one who "...radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God..." Now there can be no confusion. Now we can see who God is. If you need a better picture of God, look to Jesus.

1. **What picture of God have you gotten from the world?**
2. **What picture of God have you gotten from the church?**
3. **What picture of God do you get when you look at the life and teachings of Jesus?**

WEEK 1: TUE (Hebrews 1:5-14)

For God never said to any angel what he said to Jesus:

“You are my Son.

Today I have become your Father.”

God also said,

“I will be his Father,

and he will be my Son.”

And when he brought his supreme Son into the world, God said,[d]

“Let all of God’s angels worship him.”

Regarding the angels, he says,

“He sends his angels like the winds,

his servants like flames of fire.”

But to the Son he says,

“Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever.

You rule with a scepter of justice.

You love justice and hate evil.

Therefore, O God, your God has anointed you,

pouring out the oil of joy on you more than on anyone else.”

He also says to the Son,

*“In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundation of the earth
and made the heavens with your hands.*

They will perish, but you remain forever.

They will wear out like old clothing.

You will fold them up like a cloak

and discard them like old clothing.

But you are always the same;

you will live forever.”

And God never said to any of the angels,

“Sit in the place of honor at my right hand

until I humble your enemies,

making them a footstool under your feet.”

Therefore, angels are only servants—spirits sent to care for people who will inherit salvation.

I know someone who is really into angels. She has different representations of angels all over her house. They are really quite beautiful. She is so into angel I am surprised she didn't name one of her children Angel. That would have been cool.

The Bible is filled with stories of angels serving the will of God. And they do it in such cool ways. They wield fiery swords. They blind evil people with light. They scare donkeys. They smite armies. They bring messages to virgins about having babies. They sing in choirs. They show up in dreams. They bring food to tired prophets, even Jesus himself. And I haven't even mentioned everything they do in the book of Revelation!

Even though angels are cool we must never forget that they can never take the place of the Son of God. As we read in Psalms 103:20-22,

*Praise the LORD, you angels,
you mighty ones who carry out his plans,
listening for each of his commands.
Yes, praise the LORD, you armies of angels
who serve him and do his will!
Praise the LORD, everything he has created,
everything in all his kingdom.
Let all that I am praise the LORD.
So even the angels worship Jesus.*

The statements made by the author of Hebrews hint that the people valued angels more than they should. And you would think that this kind of religious fervor for a subordinate being seems silly. But let's not judge so fast.

Part of my personal journey has been putting spiritual value in religious ideas and practices that never deserved it. How many times did I think that listening to certain preachers speak would make the difference in my life? Or that attending some grand conference in sunny San Diego would help me find the strength to resist temptation? Or that reading a certain author's book would give me the secret to finding spiritual success? None of these things are bad per se. But just like angels, they serve a higher calling.

When we put all our spiritual and emotional energy on these things we are settling for an inferior power. Angels, just like books, seminars, preachers and retreats, are meant to serve a greater power. Jesus is that power. And if Jesus determines to use these tools to help us walk closer to him, we worship Jesus not the tools.

- 1. What approach has Jesus used to help you walk closer to Him?**
- 2. What spiritual tools have you found helpful in your spiritual walk?**
- 3. What are some good things that have taken your attention from Jesus?**

WEEK 1: WED (Hebrews 2:1-4)

So we must listen very carefully to the truth we have heard, or we may drift away from it. For the message God delivered through angels has always stood firm, and every violation of the law and every act of disobedience was punished. So what makes us think we can escape if we ignore this great salvation that was first announced by the Lord Jesus himself and then delivered to us by those who heard him speak? And God confirmed the message by giving signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit whenever he chose.

There is no such thing as being static when it comes to the faith journey. What I mean by that is that you don't have the option of remaining the same when you walk with Jesus. Becoming a disciple of Christ means that you are going to be in constant transformation mode. Over time you will be transformed, guaranteed. This is good news.

Martin Luther put it this way:

"This life therefore is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness; not health but healing; not being but becoming ... We are not yet what we shall be but we are growing toward it. The process is not yet finished but it is going on. This is not the end, but it is the road."

But growth only happens as you continue in that relationship. As you invest in your connection with God, through Bible study, prayer, worship, community, and many other spiritual disciplines you will continue to become more and more like Jesus. But if you decide to not engage through these opportunities and others like it you are not going to just stay frozen in your current spiritual condition.

We are human “becomings” more than human beings. That means we are always changing. And the decision for you and me is whether we will change toward becoming more or less like Christ. The author of Hebrews knew this reality when he wrote:

“So we must listen very carefully to the truth we have heard, or we may drift away from it.”

He knew that if the Jews would turn their backs on what they had come to experience through Jesus, ultimately they would drift away from the truth. We are no different. That is why discipleship is such an important part of what we do at Crosswalk. And we are here to walk with you as you seek to become more and more like Christ. Our goal is that no one would drift away from Jesus.

- 1. In what area of your life do you see growth?**
- 2. Have you ever felt like you were drifting away from Jesus? What helped you get back?**
- 3. What can you do to help people who seem to be drifting away from God?**

WEEK 1: THU (Hebrews 2:5-10)

And furthermore, it is not angels who will control the future world we are talking about. For in one place the Scriptures say,

*“What are mere mortals that you should think about them,
or a son of man that you should care for him?*

*Yet for a little while you made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honor.*

You gave them authority over all things.”

Now when it says “all things,” it means nothing is left out. But we have not yet seen all things put under their authority. What we do see is Jesus, who for a little while was given a position “a little lower than the angels”; and because he suffered death for us, he is now “crowned with glory and honor.” Yes, by God’s grace, Jesus tasted death for everyone. God, for whom and through whom everything was made, chose to bring many children into glory. And it was only right that he should make Jesus, through his suffering, a perfect leader, fit to bring them into their salvation.

Deep down in my soul I am a control freak. I want to be in control over everything in my life. That's why I schedule every minute of my day. I have a plan of how my day is going to go from the moment I wake up until the moment I put my head on the pillow. The problem is the world doesn't follow my schedule.

You want to put me in the foulest of moods? Disrupt my schedule. I don't necessarily think that that means there is something wrong with me. The need for control and authority over my own life is deep within me. It's probably within you too.

How many times have you had the experience of ripping control from the hands of God because you know better how to run your life? A huge part of the discipleship journey is to learn to surrender and to give God complete control over every part of your life and that's hard.

I bet the author of Hebrews wrote this portion of scripture with a smirk on his face, finding the irony funny. He was probably someone who had given complete control of his life over to God but he knew that there would be a time in the future some day where humans would be put in authority over everything even though humans, in the pecking order of cosmic beings, are considered just below angels.

Because of what Jesus has done for us, one day we will sit on a throne and have authority over all, not to be the natural control-freaks that we tend to be, but to sit next to Jesus and to no longer be controlled and manipulated by evil, but now to have control over all things and to put all things in place as they were meant to be from the beginning. This is our destiny. This is our place. This is what Jesus has done for us.

- 1. What are some areas of your life where you feel you are out of control?**
- 2. What are some areas of your life that you feel you are in control of?**
- 3. What part of your life is God asking you to surrender to him today?**

WEEK 1: FRI (Hebrews 2:11-18)

So now Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters. For he said to God,

*“I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters.
I will praise you among your assembled people.”*

He also said,

*“I will put my trust in him,”
that is, “I and the children God has given me.”*

Because God’s children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.

We also know that the Son did not come to help angels; he came to help the descendants of Abraham. Therefore, it was necessary for him to be made in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters, so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. Then he could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people. Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested.

Family is a curious thing. You're born into a family, then you grow up and now you start looking for someone to create another family. When you jump into that process, you can never imagine what your family will look like in the future. You don't know if you're going to have a large family or a small family, a quiet family or a loud family.

And even once you have your family established, you never know what you're gonna face. Some families face challenges very well. They come together, they support one another, they're there for each other. Other families fall apart in the face of tragedy. When you get into a family you can never truly know what your family will become.

Most families have a mix of good and bad, strengths and weaknesses. It's inevitable. Families are just a reflection of the people that make them up.

Because of Jesus, you now have the opportunity to be in another family. The author of Hebrews has let you know that you are now part of the family of God. He is your father, Jesus is your brother and we are all siblings.

The difference between this family and all other families is who the father is, who the big brother is. Because of our big brother and our father and all the angels that are here to serve our family, it will not fall apart when being tested. Our Father sent our brother to "break the power of the devil who had the power of death." Now there isn't anything that can destroy the family of God.

- 1. If you were to describe your family of origin in one sentence how would you do it?**
- 2. How does it feel to know that you can be a part of the family of God?**
- 3. What are some challenges facing your family right now that you need Jesus to help you with?**

BETTER PROMISES: WEEK 2

WEEK 2: MON (Hebrews 3:1-11)

And so, dear brothers and sisters who belong to God and are partners with those called to heaven, think carefully about this Jesus whom we declare to be God's messenger and High Priest. For he was faithful to God, who appointed him, just as Moses served faithfully when he was entrusted with God's entire house.

But Jesus deserves far more glory than Moses, just as a person who builds a house deserves more praise than the house itself. For every house has a builder, but the one who built everything is God.

Moses was certainly faithful in God's house as a servant. His work was an illustration of the truths God would reveal later. But Christ, as the Son, is in charge of God's entire house. And we are God's house, if we keep our courage and remain confident in our hope in Christ.

That is why the Holy Spirit says,

*"Today when you hear his voice,
don't harden your hearts
as Israel did when they rebelled,
when they tested me in the wilderness.*

*There your ancestors tested and tried my patience,
even though they saw my miracles for forty years.*

So I was angry with them, and I said,

*'Their hearts always turn away from me.
They refuse to do what I tell them.'*

So in my anger I took an oath:

'They will never enter my place of rest.'"

Celebrities capture our attention. Now before you go rolling your eyes I don't necessarily mean just those that we see in Hollywood. All of us have some level of celebrity that enthralls us, draws our gaze, if even for a moment. For some of us it's celebrities from Hollywood. Others of us love to follow musicians or authors or playwrights. Believe it or not, there are even religious celebrities.

The people of God had their own celebrities. Of course, Abraham was one of them. He was considered the OG Israelite. King David was a celebrity as well, considered the greatest king of all time, whose future lineage would produce the Messiah.

But very few Israelite celebrities could hold a candle to Moses, the man chosen by God to free the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. If Israelite children had trading cards Moses' card would be a collector's edition that everyone would want to trade for. So you can imagine how the people who heard the message of Hebrews felt when the author stated that Jesus was greater than Moses.

These Israelites were considering abandoning Jesus and going back to what Moses had established, the old sacrificial system in the desert temple. But the author is very clear: if you go back to Moses you're going back to something inferior. Moses as great as he was is nothing compared to Jesus.

And all our spiritual celebrities. The people that we admire at our church, the leaders who have made such a difference in our lives, the pastors who have preached such inspirational sermons,

these men and women who play such an important role in our lives are not unimportant but they can never take the place of Jesus.

- 1. Who has played an important role in your spiritual life?**
- 2. How has God used your church to help you grow spiritually?**
- 3. How can you make sure that no one takes the place of Jesus in your life?**

WEEK 2: TUE (Hebrews 3:12-19)

Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. You must warn each other every day, while it is still “today,” so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ. Remember what it says:

*“Today when you hear his voice,
don’t harden your hearts
as Israel did when they rebelled.”*

And who was it who rebelled against God, even though they heard his voice? Wasn’t it the people Moses led out of Egypt? And who made God angry for forty years? Wasn’t it the people who sinned, whose corpses lay in the wilderness? And to whom was God speaking when he took an oath that they would never enter his rest? Wasn’t it the people who disobeyed him? So we see that because of their unbelief they were not able to enter his rest.

The Israelites have always baffled me. When I think about everything that they experienced as they were coming out of Egypt, I don't understand the decisions that they made. Think about it. They saw all the plagues while they were in Egypt. Then they left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea miraculously, being led by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. When they were thirsty, God brought water out of a rock. When they were hungry, God brought birds out of the sky and bread out of the ground. They came to Mount Sinai and saw a great demonstration of God's power that overwhelmed them. What else did they need to know to believe that God was with them and leading them? And they still turned their back on him.

I want to judge the Israelites for the lack of faith, for their lack of following the will of God but when I think about my own life, I realize I'm not much different. I'm a lot like the Israelites who received this letter from the author of Hebrews. At any moment I'm in danger of turning my back on God if things get hard. But I don't want to be that guy and I'm sure you don't either.

It's great to know that the author of Hebrews understood that the community can be a weapon against turning away from God. When we plug into the community, the family of God that we are all now a part of, we can watch out for each other. The author of Hebrews tells us to warn one another so that we don't fall away.

- 1. Who is someone who watches your back, spiritually speaking?**
- 2. Has there ever been a time where you felt like turning away from God? How did you deal with that situation?**
- 3. What is the right approach when you see someone walking down a dangerous path?**

WEEK 2: WED (Hebrews 4:1-11)

God's promise of entering his rest still stands, so we ought to tremble with fear that some of you might fail to experience it. For this good news—that God has prepared this rest—has been announced to us just as it was to them. But it did them no good because they didn't share the faith of those who listened to God. For only we who believe can enter his rest. As for the others, God said,

*"In my anger I took an oath:
'They will never enter my place of rest,'"*

even though this rest has been ready since he made the world. We know it is ready because of the place in the Scriptures where it mentions the seventh day: "On the seventh day God rested from all his work." But in the other passage God said, "They will never enter my place of rest." So God's rest is there for people to enter, but those who first heard this good news failed to enter because they disobeyed God. So God set another time for entering his rest, and that time is today. God announced this through David much later in the words already quoted:

*"Today when you hear his voice,
don't harden your hearts."*

Now if Joshua had succeeded in giving them this rest, God would not have spoken about another day of rest still to come. So there is a special rest still waiting for the people of God. For all who have entered into God's rest have rested from their labors, just as God did after creating the world. So let us do our best to enter that rest. But if we disobey God, as the people of Israel did, we will fall.

It seems to be getting harder and harder to get good rest these days. Every time I've struggled to sleep at night I've gotten all kinds of advice: melatonin, magnesium, blue light glasses, chamomile tea. Everyone seems to know the best way to get rest.

You know the feeling of staring up at the ceiling in the middle of the night wishing, hoping, praying that you could just fall asleep. You try everything and nothing seems to work. Your mind races, refusing to shut off. If you're anything like me, you ultimately give up, get up and try to get some work done even if it's 3:30 in the morning.

The author of Hebrews makes an interesting connection between rest and faith. It seems that everyone is invited to experience the rest that God is offering. but only those who have faith will truly enter into this rest. For only those who believe can enter His rest.

The kind of belief that's necessary to truly rest is a belief that God is in control, that God is my provider, that God has taken care of everything in my life. The reason I wake up in the middle of the night and stare at the ceiling and can't turn off my thoughts is because I have not surrendered. I have not given God complete and total control of every aspect of my life, and I worry. I worry that I'll lose it all. I worry that I'll make the wrong decision. I worry that I will hurt my family. I worry that people will find out who I truly am and I'll be rejected. And all these thoughts and worries and concerns don't allow me to rest.

But if I submit it all to God, if I put it all in His hands, if I tell him you take over, now I can stop worrying. Now I can stop scheming. Now I can stop tossing and turning in my bed at night and enter into the best rest anyone could ask for. The rest God is offering.

1. **What keeps you up at night?**
2. **What stops you from surrendering completely to God?**
3. **What would it look like for you to enter into God's rest today?**

WEEK 2: THU (Hebrews 4:12-13)

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable.

I'll never forget the day I received that call. I was a youth pastor and really struggling. I felt like my ministry was not going anywhere and neither was my relationship with God. I didn't know if I was going to make it.

That's when the call came through. A dear sister in the church asked to meet with me. She said she had a word for me from God. I sat with her unsure of what I was going to hear come out of her mouth. It could be complete nonsense or the moment my life would change forever. She opened up the Bible and said that God told her to give me this passage.

So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1
And she was right. It was exactly what my heart had to hear. I needed to know that God had not given up on me and that I was called by him to be a pastor and to build the Kingdom. My Ministry has never been the same since that moment.

That experience and the experience of so many others has cemented in my mind that the word of God has unlimited power. It has the power to convict, to correct, to inspire and to transform. Whatever you need in your life right now can be found in the Word of God. Continue to focus on it like you're doing today. Let it cut through all the noise, let it trim all the fat, open your heart to what God has to say and watch your life be transformed.

- 1. What has been the most challenging thing you've read in the word of God?**
- 2. How has God used his word to impact your life?**
- 3. How can you share this power with others?**

WEEK 2: FRI (Hebrews 4:14-16)

So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

Who doesn't want to be bolder in life? Nobody wants to walk around feeling weak. Every day we want to wake up and forcefully, with command and courage, to take on the day. Every little kid dreams of standing up to the bully, of being the superhero, of saving the world. We all want to live with a little more boldness. Some of us a lot.

The author of Hebrews is telling us that this is possible. It's possible to boldly stand before the god of the universe, the one who is all powerful, and could destroy us with one word. But we have nothing to fear.

Jesus Took on the role of High Priest when he gave his life for us. The high priest stands before God and represents His people, interceding for them, asking for God's grace and mercy. And the reason that we can come with boldness is that Jesus, our High Priest, gets us. He knows what it's like to be human. He knows what it's like to feel weak. He knows what it's like to face temptation. He knows what it's like to be on the brink of losing it all.

And he stands before the father and he pleads to the father to have mercy on us on our good days and our bad days, when we get it all right and when we completely fall on our faces, when we believe and when we doubt. The greatest High Priest of all time is in heaven right now and He's on our side. That is why we can come boldly before our God.

- 1. What does it mean to you that Jesus is a high priest?**
- 2. How would you like to see more boldness in your life?**
- 3. Have you ever felt like you couldn't come before God? Why?**

BETTER PROMISES: WEEK 3

WEEK 3: MON (Hebrews 5:1-14)

Every high priest is a man chosen to represent other people in their dealings with God. He presents their gifts to God and offers sacrifices for their sins. And he is able to deal gently with ignorant and wayward people because he himself is subject to the same weaknesses. That is why he must offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as theirs.

And no one can become a high priest simply because he wants such an honor. He must be called by God for this work, just as Aaron was. That is why Christ did not honor himself by assuming he could become High Priest. No, he was chosen by God, who said to him,

“You are my Son.

Today I have become your Father.”

And in another passage God said to him,

“You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.”

While Jesus was here on earth, he offered prayers and pleadings, with a loud cry and tears, to the one who could rescue him from death. And God heard his prayers because of his deep reverence for God. Even though Jesus was God’s Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. In this way, God qualified him as a perfect High Priest, and he became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him. And God designated him to be a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

There is much more we would like to say about this, but it is difficult to explain, especially since you are spiritually dull and don’t seem to listen. You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God’s word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food. For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn’t know how to do what is right. Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong.

Sometimes you can find the perfect job. I have been in the ministry for over 25 years. I have pastored all kinds of churches. I’ve been involved in so many different kinds of ministries. I’ve had the honor of traveling around the world and seeing God work in so many different ways. When I started thinking about a career, I never thought I was going to be a pastor. I had my heart set on being a computer scientist, on making a lot of money and becoming very successful. But God had other ideas.

I now serve as a pastor in the Crosswalk family of churches. Forgive me but this may sound a little braggadocious but I feel like I’m the perfect person for this position. And it’s not because I have some special skill or I’m exceedingly talented in any one area of pastoral ministry. In fact, before I became a Crosswalk pastor, other than attending once in a while, I’d never been involved with Crosswalk. So what makes me think that I am the perfect person for this position? Honestly, it’s because of all the experiences I’ve had prior to becoming a Crosswalk pastor. The successes, the failures, the ups, the downs, the celebration and the tears; all of those put together over years and years of relying on myself and failing and leaning on God and succeeding have given me all that I need to be in the position I am today.

The author of Hebrews has made a declaration that Jesus is the perfect High Priest. He stands before God representing you and I. And the reason that Jesus can stand in that position is because of His experience while he was on Earth. Jesus became human so that he could

experience everything we have experienced. And that reality allows Him to stand before God and say “I understand.”

Jesus understands your pain. Jesus understands your disappointment. Jesus understands your anxiety. Jesus understands your depression. Jesus understands your fear. Jesus understands your weakness. There isn't anything that you are experiencing that Jesus hasn't experienced himself. So whatever you're going through, know this: Jesus Christ, you're perfect High Priest, understands you.

1. When you are going through challenges in your life do you tend to share it with others or keep it to yourself?
2. What is something about your life that you wish more people understood?
3. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus understands you?

WEEK 3: TUE (Hebrews 6:1-12)

So let us stop going over the basic teachings about Christ again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding. Surely we don't need to start again with the fundamental importance of repenting from evil deeds and placing our faith in God. You don't need further instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And so, God willing, we will move forward to further understanding.

For it is impossible to bring back to repentance those who were once enlightened—those who have experienced the good things of heaven and shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the age to come—and who then turn away from God. It is impossible to bring such people back to repentance; by rejecting the Son of God, they themselves are nailing him to the cross once again and holding him up to public shame. When the ground soaks up the falling rain and bears a good crop for the farmer, it has God's blessing. But if a field bears thorns and thistles, it is useless. The farmer will soon condemn that field and burn it.

Dear friends, even though we are talking this way, we really don't believe it applies to you. We are confident that you are meant for better things, things that come with salvation. For God is not unjust. He will not forget how hard you have worked for him and how you have shown your love to him by caring for other believers, as you still do. Our great desire is that you will keep on loving others as long as life lasts, in order to make certain that what you hope for will come true. Then you will not become spiritually dull and indifferent. Instead, you will follow the example of those who are going to inherit God's promises because of their faith and endurance.

It seems that these days there's many different versions of “Christians.” You would think since we all read the same Bible and we all believe in the same Jesus that we would all act in the same ways. But you know that this is not true.

If you are honest with yourself, you would even admit that there are days that you are more “Christian” than others. And these days there are forces beyond us trying to make Christianity something that it was never meant to be. This reality begs the question “What kind of Christian am I?”

But I think a better question is, “What is true Christianity?” or maybe the even better question is, “What kind of disciples was Jesus trying to establish?”

That is a question that we wrestle with every day as we try to apply the gospel to our daily lives. And as we receive light from God in answer to this question the scariest question of all pops up, "How do I know if I am truly a disciple of Christ?"

The author of Hebrews talks about the spiritual growth process where one starts with milk and continues to grow in Christ and starts eating spiritual meat. This is the process every disciple of Christ ultimately goes through and as one grows, one continues to evaluate his or her growth trying to determine whether he or she is on the right path. And I love that the author of Hebrews gives us one of the points of evaluation to help us understand how we're doing in our discipleship journey.

For God is not unjust. He will not forget how hard you have worked for him and how you have shown your love to him by caring for other believers, as you still do. Our great desire is that you will keep on loving others as long as life lasts, in order to make certain that what you hope for will come true. Hebrews 6:10-11

So there you have it. The way we care and love each other is one of the greatest indicators that we are growing in Christ. It's that simple. Lovewell.

1. **At this point in your Christian experience do you feel like you are drinking spiritual milk or eating spiritual meat?**
2. **How have you seen Christians acting un-christlike?**
3. **When are you at the greatest risk of acting un-christlike?**

WEEK 3: WED (Hebrews 6:13-20)

For example, there was God's promise to Abraham. Since there was no one greater to swear by, God took an oath in his own name, saying:

*"I will certainly bless you,
and I will multiply your descendants beyond number."*

Then Abraham waited patiently, and he received what God had promised.

Now when people take an oath, they call on someone greater than themselves to hold them to it. And without any question that oath is binding. God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind.

So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary. Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Do you remember when you were a kid and you wanted to make a promise? The reason you made that promise is you wanted to make sure that the person to whom you were making the promise believed you. If you were making the promise to a good friend, the promise was enough. But if you were making the promise to someone who didn't know you very well you had to ramp it up. You would say something like, "I promise on my.." and you would fill in the blank with something or someone that was valuable. How many times did I promise something "on my mother's life?" The silly things children say.

When you make a promise on something or someone, you've elevated that promise to the level of an oath. An oath is a promise you make that is guaranteed by something or someone greater. On August 17th 2003, I made an oath to my wife that we would live together forever. The reason it's an oath is that I made it in front of many witnesses including God. An oath is like a promise on steroids.

The author of Hebrews is telling us that God not only made a promise but he made an oath as well. And God being the biggest strongest most powerful being in all of the universe made that oath on himself. God is basically saying I promise on my own name that you are my child. You are the fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham and Jesus is now standing before God as our high priest interceding for us because of that oath, because of that promise. That reality should give us confidence to approach God in every situation. We can claim that promise today and live as children of God.

1. **How do you understand the difference between a promise and an oath?**
2. **Has anyone ever broken a promise to you? Have you ever broken a promise to someone? How did that feel?**
3. **What is a promise of God that is meaningful to you?**

WEEK 3: THU (Hebrews 7:1-14)

This Melchizedek was king of the city of Salem and also a priest of God Most High. When Abraham was returning home after winning a great battle against the kings, Melchizedek met him and blessed him. Then Abraham took a tenth of all he had captured in battle and gave it to Melchizedek. The name Melchizedek means “king of justice,” and king of Salem means “king of peace.” There is no record of his father or mother or any of his ancestors—no beginning or end to his life. He remains a priest forever, resembling the Son of God.

Consider then how great this Melchizedek was. Even Abraham, the great patriarch of Israel, recognized this by giving him a tenth of what he had taken in battle. Now the law of Moses required that the priests, who are descendants of Levi, must collect a tithe from the rest of the people of Israel, who are also descendants of Abraham. But Melchizedek, who was not a descendant of Levi, collected a tenth from Abraham. And Melchizedek placed a blessing upon Abraham, the one who had already received the promises of God. And without question, the person who has the power to give a blessing is greater than the one who is blessed.

The priests who collect tithes are men who die, so Melchizedek is greater than they are, because we are told that he lives on. In addition, we might even say that these Levites—the ones who collect the tithe—paid a tithe to Melchizedek when their ancestor Abraham paid a tithe to him. For although Levi wasn’t born yet, the seed from which he came was in Abraham’s body when Melchizedek collected the tithe from him.

So if the priesthood of Levi, on which the law was based, could have achieved the perfection God intended, why did God need to establish a different priesthood, with a priest in the order of Melchizedek instead of the order of Levi and Aaron?

And if the priesthood is changed, the law must also be changed to permit it. For the priest we are talking about belongs to a different tribe, whose members have never served at the altar as priests. What I mean is, our Lord came from the tribe of Judah, and Moses never mentioned priests coming from that tribe.

I was never one of the cool kids in school. The “in crowd” was never a group I was a part of. It was obvious who the popular kids were, and I had to observe them from a distance.

There always seemed to be one girl who got the most attention from the boys. The guys would make fools of themselves just to get her to laugh or look at them. I may have fallen into this trap a few times. I would guess that there is a universal theme to every girl who filled this role in all the junior highs around the world: she loved the attention.

The best dynamic was at the beginning of the school year when a new girl arrived in the class and now that girl was the shiny toy that took the attention away from the previous queen bee. Now it was a battle to see which of these two girls would reign supreme in the contest to have the attention of the boys in the class. It was fun and cringey at the same time.

The Jewish Christians who received this letter must have found this part of the letter confusing and disturbing. All Jews were a part of a tribe and one of the most respected tribes were the Levites. They were like the pastors of our times. Spiritual leaders in the temple. Without them there could not be a functioning temple. No sacrifices could be offered.

The Levites were so important that they were taken care of by all the other tribes. This was so that the Levites could concentrate completely on serving in the temple, a great honor. I would imagine that there could have been some Levites in the crowd hearing this letter read to them. And the author says that Melchizedek is greater than the Levites. What?! This could not have been received well and yet it is true. The Levites, who thought they were great, now find out that there is a new priest in town, and his name is Jesus, and he's from the order of Melchizedek, which is greater than them.

And this reality expands to us today. I know there have been many times in my religious experience that I have found out that the old ways, the traditional ways, aren't as good as what I am learning today. That is hard because I am a loyal person and like my tradition. But now that I have Jesus, my new high priest, I have to reconsider the old ways and move in the new direction Jesus is leading me into. The old ways were good, but there is now a better way.

- 1. What is an old religious practice you have let go of? What did you replace it with?**
- 2. How hard is it for you to try new things in your spiritual journey? Why do you think that is?**
- 3. What new spiritual paths is God leading you into?**

WEEK 3: FRI (Hebrews 7:15-28)

This change has been made very clear since a different priest, who is like Melchizedek, has appeared. Jesus became a priest, not by meeting the physical requirement of belonging to the tribe of Levi, but by the power of a life that cannot be destroyed. And the psalmist pointed this out when he prophesied,

“You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.”

Yes, the old requirement about the priesthood was set aside because it was weak and useless. For the law never made anything perfect. But now we have confidence in a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

This new system was established with a solemn oath. Aaron's descendants became priests without such an oath, but there was an oath regarding Jesus. For God said to him,

“The LORD has taken an oath and will not break his vow:

‘You are a priest forever.’”

Because of this oath, Jesus is the one who guarantees this better covenant with God. There were many priests under the old system, for death prevented them from remaining in office. But because Jesus lives forever, his priesthood lasts forever. Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf.

He is the kind of high priest we need because he is holy and blameless, unstained by sin. He has been set apart from sinners and has been given the highest place of honor in heaven. Unlike those other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices every day. They did this for their own sins first and then for the sins of the people. But Jesus did this once for all when he offered himself as the sacrifice for the people's sins. The law appointed high priests who were limited by human weakness. But after the law was given, God appointed his Son with an oath, and his Son has been made the perfect High Priest forever.

There are so many tasks that we do that must be repeated consistently, and most of them are not fun. Here is my top 10 of repetitive things that I don't want to do:

1. Dishes
2. Laundry
3. Shaving
4. Washing the car
5. Making the bed
6. Getting a haircut
7. Meal prepping
8. Vacuuming
9. Watering the plants
10. Sweeping

Wouldn't it be great if there was a way that you could do these things once and never have to do them again? Imagine if you washed the dishes once and then they never got dirty again, no matter how many meals you ate on them. Or if you shaved once and the hairs on your face or legs never grew back. Or you cut your hair once and it just stayed like that. We need to get our scientists on this right away.

Because of sin, the priests had to offer sacrifices every day. There was not a day that would pass that a sacrifice wasn't offered. It had to be done. There was no choice. It was the only way to take care of the sin problem. One sacrifice wasn't going to be enough.

At least until Jesus showed up. The author of Hebrews lets us know that Jesus offered himself as the ultimate sacrifice. That means that there is no need for any more sacrifices. Jesus' life pays for the sins of all, past, present and future. Now all we need to do is accept Jesus as our savior and high priest and all our sin problems are taken care of. That is good news!

- 1. What is a chore that you are tired of doing?**
- 2. What is a life issue that you are tired of dealing with?**
- 3. Imagine Jesus standing before God interceding for you. What do you want Jesus to say to God about you?**

BETTER PROMISES: WEEK 4

WEEK 4: MON (Hebrews 8)

Here is the main point: We have a High Priest who sat down in the place of honor beside the throne of the majestic God in heaven. There he ministers in the heavenly Tabernacle, the true place of worship that was built by the Lord and not by human hands.

And since every high priest is required to offer gifts and sacrifices, our High Priest must make an offering, too. If he were here on earth, he would not even be a priest, since there already are priests who offer the gifts required by the law. They serve in a system of worship that is only a copy, a shadow of the real one in heaven. For when Moses was getting ready to build the Tabernacle, God gave him this warning: “Be sure that you make everything according to the pattern I have shown you here on the mountain.”

But now Jesus, our High Priest, has been given a ministry that is far superior to the old priesthood, for he is the one who mediates for us a far better covenant with God, based on better promises.

If the first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no need for a second covenant to replace it. But when God found fault with the people, he said:

*“The day is coming, says the LORD,
when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel and Judah.
This covenant will not be like the one
I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
and led them out of the land of Egypt.
They did not remain faithful to my covenant,
so I turned my back on them, says the LORD.
But this is the new covenant I will make
with the people of Israel on that day, says the LORD:
I will put my laws in their minds,
and I will write them on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.
And they will not need to teach their neighbors,
nor will they need to teach their relatives,
saying, ‘You should know the LORD.’
For everyone, from the least to the greatest,
will know me already.
And I will forgive their wickedness,
and I will never again remember their sins.”*

Think about the greatest spiritual moment of your life. If you are like me and have been doing the Jesus thing for a while you have had several. They are unforgettable moments that have made an impact on you. And from that moment on you were never the same.

I remember a moment early on in my ministry where I was working on hearing the voice of God. I had a member of my church that had such an intimate connection with God that she regularly heard God speaking to her. I wanted that and went on an exploratory journey to try and see if I could hear God's voice.

I was in my home office, sitting in silence, trying to calm my mind down so that I could be open to what God wanted to tell me. All of a sudden I felt as if the word "Stop" entered my mind. And immediately I understood what God was telling me. He was saying that I needed to stop trying to be a good pastor and allow him to make me into a good pastor. That was a great spiritual moment I will never forget.

Since then there have been other moments. I have experienced God in worship, conversations with people, nature, and retreats. I have found that God can show up in so many places that, if we are open to him, he can speak to us.

The sanctuary was a place where people came to experience God. It was the center of the spiritual lives of the Israelites. No place could be better or more important for them and their relationship with God. And yet it was just a shadow of what was to come.

The greatest experience you can have with God here on this earth is minuscule compared to what is coming. Your greatest moment of worship won't hold a candle to the worship you will have when you get to heaven. The best spiritual conversation you have had on earth won't touch the conversations you will have with the likes of Moses, Peter, and Paul. The beautiful landscapes that inspire you to connect with God will quickly be forgotten as you travel across the universe. The best retreat you can experience here on this earth won't compare to when you retreat with Jesus in heaven.

Because now all our experiences are just a shadow. But a time is coming when we will not live in the shadow of what is to come. We will live in the presence of God, face to face, and I will no longer struggle to hear his voice. It will be loud and clear.

- 1. What is the greatest experience of God you have ever had?**
- 2. What are some things that get in the way of you connecting with God?**
- 3. What are you most looking forward to about heaven?**

WEEK 4: TUE (Hebrews 9:1-10)

That first covenant between God and Israel had regulations for worship and a place of worship here on earth. There were two rooms in that Tabernacle. In the first room were a lampstand, a table, and sacred loaves of bread on the table. This room was called the Holy Place. Then there was a curtain, and behind the curtain was the second room called the Most Holy Place. In that room were a gold incense altar and a wooden chest called the Ark of the Covenant, which was covered with gold on all sides. Inside the Ark were a gold jar containing manna, Aaron's staff that sprouted leaves, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the Ark were the cherubim of divine glory, whose wings stretched out over the Ark's cover, the place of atonement. But we cannot explain these things in detail now.

When these things were all in place, the priests regularly entered the first room as they performed their religious duties. But only the high priest ever entered the Most Holy Place, and only once a year. And he always offered blood for his own sins and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. By these regulations the Holy Spirit revealed that the entrance to the Most Holy Place was not freely open as long as the Tabernacle and the system it represented were still in use.

This is an illustration pointing to the present time. For the gifts and sacrifices that the priests offer are not able to cleanse the consciences of the people who bring them. For that old system

deals only with food and drink and various cleansing ceremonies—physical regulations that were in effect only until a better system could be established.

The desert tabernacle has always fascinated me. I remember as a kid drawing it out, like an architect drawing blueprints. When I study this part of the Israelite story with people I still draw it out on paper to illustrate the meaning of the structure and all the pieces of furniture in them and how they all point to Jesus. It's lots of fun.

The author of Hebrews takes us on a tour of the desert tabernacle, describing the two rooms and letting us know what we would find in each room. But something seemed off when I read this description. I have drawn this tabernacle out so many times that I consider myself some kind of expert on the tabernacle layout. And there is something that isn't quite right. The altar of incense is on the wrong side of the curtain.

Behind the curtain that divides the temple into two rooms is the Ark of the Covenant (from Raiders of the Lost Ark fame). That room is called the Most Holy Place. The other room is called the Holy Place, and traditionally the altar of incense is there but not according to the author of Hebrews.

So I tried to find out if this was an error or intentional by the author and boy are there opinions by the biblical scholars. And you can imagine that there truly is no consensus on why there seems to be a discrepancy. And I haven't found the answer, well not exactly.

The altar of incense is a symbol for prayer, communication with God. The smoke rises just like our prayers. And as you know, sometimes we feel like our prayers don't get past the ceiling. But now those prayers are on the other side of the curtain, right in front of God, because we have a high priest who is in the very presence of God, interceding for us. So basically, Jesus is praying for us, and those prayers are happening right in front of God. Talk about direct access.

So is the altar of incense in the Holy Place or the Most Holy Place? I can't tell you. But here is what I can tell you. God is hearing your prayers because Jesus is interceding for you.

- 1. What have you learned about God from the desert tabernacle?**
- 2. Do you feel like God is hearing your prayers?**
- 3. What do you feel when you hear that Jesus stands in front of God interceding for you?**

WEEK 4: WED (Hebrews 9:11-28)

So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever.

Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer could cleanse people's bodies from ceremonial impurity. Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. That is why he is the one who mediates a new covenant between God and people, so that all who are called can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them. For Christ died to set them free from the penalty of the sins they had committed under that first covenant.

Now when someone leaves a will, it is necessary to prove that the person who made it is dead. The will goes into effect only after the person's death. While the person who made it is still alive, the will cannot be put into effect.

That is why even the first covenant was put into effect with the blood of an animal. For after Moses had read each of God's commandments to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, along with water, and sprinkled both the book of God's law and all the people, using hyssop branches and scarlet wool. Then he said, "This blood confirms the covenant God has made with you." And in the same way, he sprinkled blood on the Tabernacle and on everything used for worship. In fact, according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.

That is why the Tabernacle and everything in it, which were copies of things in heaven, had to be purified by the blood of animals. But the real things in heaven had to be purified with far better sacrifices than the blood of animals.

For Christ did not enter into a holy place made with human hands, which was only a copy of the true one in heaven. He entered into heaven itself to appear now before God on our behalf. And he did not enter heaven to offer himself again and again, like the high priest here on earth who enters the Most Holy Place year after year with the blood of an animal. If that had been necessary, Christ would have had to die again and again, ever since the world began. But now, once for all time, he has appeared at the end of the age to remove sin by his own death as a sacrifice.

And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment, so also Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him.
Trying to be healthy is a constant struggle. I have battled with my weight all my life. The rollercoaster of losing and gaining weight has never stopped running in my life. The victory over my appetite has never been gained.

I have tried so many approaches and even my greatest success hasn't been easy or permanent. To this day, it is a fight to stay healthy. Don't you wish that our greatest scientific minds would finally figure out why it is so hard to say no to unhealthy food and say yes to exercise? That they would get together with the funding of all the governments of the world and invent the magic pill or the perfect diet that would stop obesity once and for all. What a glorious day that would be. (I won't hold my breath, unless I'm walking by a donut shop.)
In the old sacrificial system in the tabernacle it was necessary to constantly make animal sacrifices. To pay for sins it was necessary for an animal to die.

"For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness." Hebrews 9:22
That was the only solution. Until Jesus decided to give his life. Now, because of the power of the blood of Christ, there is no need for more animal sacrifices. The Lamb of God gave his perfect blood "once for all time." The ultimate sacrifice that makes any future sacrifices unnecessary. So there may never be a solution for the weight problem, but there is a solution to the sin problem. Praise the Lord!

- 1. What is a problem you seem to face consistently?**
- 2. Jesus was willing to give his life to solve the sin problem for you. What feelings does that evoke?**
- 3. Take some time to imagine Jesus on the cross. Take a moment of prayer to thank him for His sacrifice for you.**

WEEK 4: THU (Hebrews 10:1-18)

The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves. The sacrifices under that system were repeated again and again, year after year, but they were never able to provide perfect cleansing for those who came to worship. If they could have provided perfect cleansing, the sacrifices would have stopped, for the worshipers would have been purified once for all time, and their feelings of guilt would have disappeared.

But instead, those sacrifices actually reminded them of their sins year after year. For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. That is why, when Christ came into the world, he said to God,

“You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings.

But you have given me a body to offer.

*You were not pleased with burnt offerings
or other offerings for sin.*

*Then I said, ‘Look, I have come to do your will, O God—
as is written about me in the Scriptures.’”*

First, Christ said, “You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings or burnt offerings or other offerings for sin, nor were you pleased with them” (though they are required by the law of Moses). Then he said, “Look, I have come to do your will.” He cancels the first covenant in order to put the second into effect. For God’s will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time.

Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God’s right hand. There he waits until his enemies are humbled and made a footstool under his feet. For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy.

And the Holy Spirit also testifies that this is so. For he says,

*“This is the new covenant I will make
with my people on that day, says the LORD:
I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds.”*

Then he says,

*“I will never again remember
their sins and lawless deeds.”*

And when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices.

The passage you just read should fill you with hope and encouragement. The author of Hebrews is revealing a truth about God that everyone who has struggled with sin wants to hear: God forgives and forgets.

This is so different from the way we tend to treat each other. We know that, as children of God, we should forgive, but that is easier said than done. I will admit that there are people who have hurt me or members of my family that I have not completely forgiven. It will probably take some major transformation of my heart to get to that point. I covet your prayers.

But even if I forgive them, I'm not sure I can ever forget what they did to the people that I love. I don't know if I can let it go. That will take a miracle if I am honest. But truthfully, what those people did to me is nothing compared to what I have done to God. And let's not talk about the struggles I continue to have and the mistakes that I will inevitably make. The grace that God continues to show me is indescribable.

And on top of that, when I surrender to Him the Holy Spirit declares:

*"This is the new covenant I will make
with my people on that day, says the LORD:
I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds."*

Then he says,

*"I will never again remember
their sins and lawless deeds." Hebrews 10:16-17*

And there is our hope. Forgiving and forgetting like God won't happen naturally. When God, through the Holy Spirit, puts his law in our hearts, that is when we will be able to offer forgiveness to those who have wronged us and truly reflect the heart of Jesus.

- 1. How easy is it for you to forgive someone who has wronged you?**
- 2. Are you holding a grudge against someone? What do you think you should do about it?**
- 3. How can you be more open to allowing God to transform your heart?**

WEEK 4: FRI (Hebrews 10:19-39)

And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

Dear friends, if we deliberately continue sinning after we have received knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice that will cover these sins. There is only the terrible expectation of God's judgment and the raging fire that will consume his enemies. For anyone who refused to obey the law of Moses was put to death without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Just think how much worse the punishment will be for those who have trampled on the Son of God, and have treated the blood of the covenant, which made us holy, as if it were common and unholy, and have insulted and disdained the Holy Spirit who brings God's mercy to us. For we know the one who said,

*"I will take revenge.
I will pay them back."*

He also said,

“The LORD will judge his own people.”

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

Think back on those early days when you first learned about Christ. Remember how you remained faithful even though it meant terrible suffering. Sometimes you were exposed to public ridicule and were beaten, and sometimes you helped others who were suffering the same things. You suffered along with those who were thrown into jail, and when all you owned was taken from you, you accepted it with joy. You knew there were better things waiting for you that will last forever.

So do not throw away this confident trust in the Lord. Remember the great reward it brings you! Patient endurance is what you need now, so that you will continue to do God’s will. Then you will receive all that he has promised.

*“For in just a little while,
the Coming One will come and not delay.*

*And my righteous ones will live by faith.
But I will take no pleasure in anyone who turns away.”*

But we are not like those who turn away from God to their own destruction. We are the faithful ones, whose souls will be saved.

As a pastor, many think that you have information about how to be close to God, close to the divine. And it makes sense. I mean, I do have a degree called Master of Divinity. (It’s not as impressive as it sounds).

I have been asked a lot how to grow spiritually. And that is a great question with many answers. Of course there is the standard answer: prayer and Bible study. You could also sprinkle in some time in nature, meditation, retreats and worship. Of course that is not a comprehensive list but that is a pretty good one.

You would think that with that list you could go out and just have your spiritual journey with God and become a powerful man or woman of God. Here at Crosswalk we call that a disciple. Someone who is following in the footsteps of Jesus, abiding.

But the author of Hebrews wants us to not forget a key part of the discipleship journey: *Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. Hebrews 10:23-25*

The spiritual journey was never meant to be experienced alone. You can pray, study your Bible, meditate, worship, experience nature, go on retreats but if you are doing it alone you are missing a powerful part of the journey with Christ. I believe the author of Hebrews intentionally used the phrase, “Let us...” three times in this passage to emphasize the communal approach to following Jesus.

If you ever spend any time with me talking about church, inevitably you will hear me ask some version of this question, “If we aren’t spending time together outside of the few hours of worship every Sabbath, what’s the point?” I have seen the power of the Holy Spirit unleashed in conversations in coffee shops, in times of prayer in restaurants, and in homes around people as they breathe one last time. God is present in your home when you read your Bible and in church

when we all gather to worship, but don't forget that Jesus said, "*For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.*" Matthew 18:20

- 1. Do you prefer pursuing God alone or in community? Why?**
- 2. How has the church helped you grow spiritually?**
- 3. Who are some people in your church community you can invite to be a part of your discipleship journey?**

BETTER PROMISES: WEEK 5

WEEK 5: MON (Hebrews 11:1-7)

Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see. Through their faith, the people in days of old earned a good reputation.

By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God's command, that what we now see did not come from anything that can be seen.

It was by faith that Abel brought a more acceptable offering to God than Cain did. Abel's offering gave evidence that he was a righteous man, and God showed his approval of his gifts. Although Abel is long dead, he still speaks to us by his example of faith.

It was by faith that Enoch was taken up to heaven without dying—"he disappeared, because God took him." For before he was taken up, he was known as a person who pleased God. And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.

It was by faith that Noah built a large boat to save his family from the flood. He obeyed God, who warned him about things that had never happened before. By his faith Noah condemned the rest of the world, and he received the righteousness that comes by faith.

Chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews is known by some as "The Hall of Faith." Sports fans will understand the word play here. Every major sport has a hall of fame, where the best of the best are memorialized forevermore.

Each hall of fame has standards that must be reached to be considered a "hall-of-famer." But there is no consensus on what the standard is. Whether it's wins, goals, points, strikeouts, touchdowns, running, passing, or receiving yards, there is a measurable statistical category that opens the door for the athlete to be considered and possibly included. The spaces are limited so you need to be the one of the greatest to ever play.

In Hebrews 11 we are introduced to the best of the best when it comes to faith. But the difference between the "Hall of Fame" and the "Hall of Faith" is that there is no ambiguity as to how you get into the "Hall of Faith." It's right in the first verse of the chapter:

Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see. Hebrews 11:1

Our faith is fueled by our hope. And our hope is the certainty we have that God will keep his promises. Our faith allows us to believe in things we can't see, especially about God.

And I know there are times that our faith seems to be low and fragile, but that doesn't mean we are without faith. The Hall of Faith isn't filled with people who had it all together and got everything right. Faith doesn't guarantee perfection, it just keeps us moving forward with God. And here is the best part:

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. Ephesians 2:8-9

So faith is a gift from God that you can ask for today. So go ahead, and welcome to the Hall of Faith.

1. **Do you feel your faith is strong today? Why or why not?**
2. **If you were Noah, what would your response have been to God when he asked you to build the boat?**
3. **How would you like to see your faith in action?**

WEEK 5: TUE (Hebrews 11:8-16)

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going. And even when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in tents. And so did Isaac and Jacob, who inherited the same promise. Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God.

It was by faith that even Sarah was able to have a child, though she was barren and was too old. She believed that God would keep his promise. And so a whole nation came from this one man who was as good as dead—a nation with so many people that, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, there is no way to count them.

All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth. Obviously people who say such things are looking forward to a country they can call their own. If they had longed for the country they came from, they could have gone back. But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Sarah being included in the Hall of Faith is kind of funny to me. God came to Abraham and told him that Sarah would have a child. Here was her reaction:

Abraham and Sarah were both very old by this time, and Sarah was long past the age of having children. So she laughed silently to herself and said, “How could a worn-out woman like me enjoy such pleasure, especially when my master—my husband—is also so old?” Genesis 18:11-12

God made her and Abraham a promise and she did not believe it at first. She laughed at the idea that an old woman and man could ever produce a child. But the author of Hebrews is clear that at some point, her doubt turned to faith. What could have lead to this change? The same thing that will move you and I from doubt to faith, focusing on the promises of God. When we look back at what God has done for us in the past, how He has kept His promises, it builds our faith in Him and gives us hope for the future.

1. **How has God kept his promises to you in the past?**
2. **What gives you hope for the future?**
3. **What can you do to keep reminding yourself of God's promises?**

WEEK 5: WED (Hebrews 11:17-28)

It was by faith that Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice when God was testing him. Abraham, who had received God's promises, was ready to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, even though God

had told him, "Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted." Abraham reasoned that if Isaac died, God was able to bring him back to life again. And in a sense, Abraham did receive his son back from the dead.

It was by faith that Isaac promised blessings for the future to his sons, Jacob and Esau. It was by faith that Jacob, when he was old and dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons and bowed in worship as he leaned on his staff.

It was by faith that Joseph, when he was about to die, said confidently that the people of Israel would leave Egypt. He even commanded them to take his bones with them when they left. It was by faith that Moses' parents hid him for three months when he was born. They saw that God had given them an unusual child, and they were not afraid to disobey the king's command. It was by faith that Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

He chose to share the oppression of God's people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin. He thought it was better to suffer for the sake of Christ than to own the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to his great reward. It was by faith that Moses left the land of Egypt, not fearing the king's anger. He kept right on going because he kept his eyes on the one who is invisible. It was by faith that Moses commanded the people of Israel to keep the Passover and to sprinkle blood on the doorposts so that the angel of death would not kill their firstborn sons. One goal that parents have is to pass along something of value to their kids. It wasn't long ago that my mother asked me to be present as she planned out her living trust. She wanted to leave all her affairs in order and clearly decide how to leave all her valuables to my brother and I. We are now co-trustees and are to work together to take care of my mother's affairs. Pray that we can remain loving brothers when the time comes.

An inheritance is something that we can leave to our children. We can leave them homes, family heirlooms, recipes, and all kinds of earthly possessions. But nothing is more valuable than leaving our kids a great legacy.

In this portion of Hebrews 11 we see the legacy of faith that Abraham left Isaac. And once Abraham passed along his faith in God, we see that faith continue from generation to generation, all the way to Moses himself.

And that legacy of faith continues. You and I are a product of that faith. It has never stopped flowing. It continues to this day. We can leave our kids lots of cool things, and we should do that. But let's not overlook the importance of sharing our faith in God with them, all the time, every day.

- 1. How did your parents share their faith with you?**
- 2. How have you seen faith passed along?**
- 3. How can you share your faith with the next generation?**

WEEK 5: THU (Hebrews 11:28-32)

It was by faith that the people of Israel went right through the Red Sea as though they were on dry ground. But when the Egyptians tried to follow, they were all drowned.

It was by faith that the people of Israel marched around Jericho for seven days, and the walls came crashing down.

It was by faith that Rahab the prostitute was not destroyed with the people in her city who refused to obey God. For she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

How much more do I need to say? It would take too long to recount the stories of the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and all the prophets.

Faith in action doesn't make sense. Maybe that is why practicing faith is so much harder than declaring it. Saying you have faith in God takes no effort whatsoever but actually taking a step of faith is a whole other story.

There have been many moments of stepping out in faith in my life. Deciding to not be a Computer Scientist and becoming a pastor instead was one of those moments. Every time God has moved me from a successful ministry situation into an unknown ministry situation has been a step of faith. Some steps have been big and some have been small but they have all been challenging and have made little sense.

Imagine standing in front of the Red Sea and being told to step into it. Or standing in front of the massive walls of the city of Jericho and being told to walk around it. Or being told that your city will be destroyed and to save yourself, all you have to do is hang a scarf out of your window. None of these instructions make any sense but faith, to the world, doesn't make sense. There is not scientific data, no tangible evidence that says that walking into an ocean will deliver dry land, or that walking around a city will bring the walls down and deliver a victory.

And nothing told me that leaving a comfortable major would make me a success as a pastor. All I had was faith, and the willingness to take the first step. Sometimes, most of the time, that step was all I could see. The rest was unclear. But what was clear was that God was calling, He was leading, and my experience following God was that he was always with me and up to that moment, he had kept all His promises to me. And in the end, that is all I have needed to step forward in faith.

- 1. How hard is it for you to take a step of faith?**
- 2. What do you need to see or experience to take a step of faith?**
- 3. In what area of your life is God asking you to take a step of faith?**

WEEK 5: FRI (Hebrews 11:33-40)

By faith these people overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions, quenched the flames of fire, and escaped death by the edge of the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength. They became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight. Women received their loved ones back again from death.

But others were tortured, refusing to turn from God in order to be set free. They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection. Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in prisons. Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half, and others were killed with the sword. Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated. They were too good for this world, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.

All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised. For God had something better in mind for us, so that they would not reach perfection without us.

Being a Christian is awesome. I decided to give my life to Jesus in my early 20's and I have never regretted that decision. My career, my family, my calling, has all come because of my decision to be a disciple of Christ.

That being said, not every moment has been great. There have been very difficult times. I have experienced failure, depression, loss, sickness, death, persecution, perceived disconnection from God, criticism, relationship challenges, and the suffering of my children. There have been some great moments but also some very dark times. This is the reality of following Christ.

The Hall of Faith has some great stories in it but it also has its tragedies. The faithful followers of Christ were persecuted, jailed, and even killed. This should come as no shock to us when we consider the life of Jesus, who was rejected by his own people, abandoned by his own followers, persecuted by his own church, and killed by the government. We love to say that we are to live the life Christ lived, except for the bad parts. I don't believe it works that way.

Faith doesn't guarantee that everything is gonna be alright on this earth. Faith is what gets us through the challenges that we will inevitably face. We will experience many great things while serving God, but our faith is in what we will experience beyond this earth. Whatever you are going through right now, allow your faith to help you look beyond the darkness and give you hope for what will come next,

"For God had something better in mind for us..." Hebrews 11:40

- 1. Describe a great spiritual moment you had with God. Describe a dark spiritual time you experienced. How did you get through that dark time?**
- 2. What are you going through right now that is challenging your faith? What do you need God to do about it?**
- 3. How can you help someone who is going through a difficult time?**

BETTER PROMISES: WEEK 6

WEEK 6: MON (Hebrews 12:1-6)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people] then you won't become weary and give up. After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin.

*And have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said,
"My child, don't make light of the LORD's discipline,
and don't give up when he corrects you.
For the LORD disciplines those he loves,
and he punishes each one he accepts as his child."*

Goals are important. Whether they are personal, health, financial, academic or spiritual goals they all help us focus. They keep us going toward a target. They motivate us to keep going.

A while back I had the goal of running a 10K. I have been involved in many athletic activities as a younger man but never running long distance. I figured that jogging would be less painful and dangerous than the backyard tackle football games I played as a foolish teenager. So I thought I would join my wife and begin the training to run a 10K. How hard could it be?

I quickly realized that it was going to be a lot harder than I anticipated. That first run was enough of an excuse for me to give up. And I wanted to give up but I couldn't. You know why? I had signed up to run the 10K in the Boise Marathon. Not only that, members of my family had signed up as well. I couldn't give up because I had a goal. In front of my whole family, I had to cross that finish line.

So every training run had to be completed. All the right food had to be consumed. All the necessary rest had to happen. I had to push through all the negative thoughts and overcome my habit of giving up when things got hard. I had to persevere. I had to endure. And it felt so good when I crossed the finish line, having defeated every obstacle that got in my way, most of them internal. I reached my goal.

The author of Hebrews needed the followers of Christ to know that they needed to endure all they were experiencing. This was their opportunity to show that they could endure. That their faith was more than words. That following Jesus gives the power to persevere to the very end. The same goes for us.

The spiritual journey is run in front of a crowd. People are watching us as we who claim to be followers of Christ run the race of faith. They want to see if we will crumble under the pressure, if we will give up on the message that we preach. They want to see if what we say is true. So if you are struggling at this moment, keep the goal in mind:

Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Hebrews 12:2

1. **What are your spiritual goals for this year?**
2. **Do you tend to give up when things get hard? Why or why not?**
3. **When things get hard, what can you do to endure?**

WEEK 6: TUE (Hebrews 12:7-12)

As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father? If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all. Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever?

For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.

So take a new grip with your tired hands and strengthen your weak knees.

Sports movies are the best. Especially when the story is about the down-and-out unlikely hero who starts the movie weak and finishes strong and comes out victorious. When the final goal is scored, the finish-line tape is broken or the rival hits the deck you just want to jump out of your seat and yell at the top of your lungs.

But that's not my favorite part of these movies. You know what part I always look forward to? The training montage. Those are the most exciting and iconic moments of the movie. Who can ever forget Rocky running down the streets of Philadelphia being chased by a group of kids? Or Danielsan's Wax On, Wax Off technique? Or Mulan training to be a soldier? Or Bruce Wayne learning to become Batman?

What all these characters have in common is that they all had to decide to be disciplined. They all had to go through rigorous training. They couldn't become the victors if they didn't go through the pain that comes with discipline. In other words, for them to be champions they couldn't just sit on the couch snacking while binging Netflix (which I may have done last night, regrettably).

The word used in this passage for discipline could be translated Discipline, instruction, training or education. I believe that God is doing all of those things to us as we journey with him, and at times it is a painful process. Transformation is rarely without discomfort, in fact, it's almost guaranteed. But God does this because he loves us. We are his children and God wants the best for his kids. And that means there are times when we will be in that training montage, spiritually speaking. It won't be easy, but it will be awesome and lead us to victory.

- 1. What has been the hardest part of following Jesus?**
- 2. How have you seen God disciplining you?**
- 3. Where in your spiritual life have you seen the most growth?**

WEEK 6: WED (Hebrews 12:13-17)

Mark out a straight path for your feet so that those who are weak and lame will not fall but become strong.

Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord. Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many. Make sure that no one is immoral or godless like Esau, who traded his birthright as the firstborn son

for a single meal. You know that afterward, when he wanted his father's blessing, he was rejected. It was too late for repentance, even though he begged with bitter tears.

In this passage we find several instructions, commands if you will, for the believers receiving this letter. Let's look at them one at a time:

"Mark out a straight path for your feet..."

The phrase "mark out" can be translated to construct. This could be thought as making decisions and plans for your life that will create the straight path you want to walk in. In simpler terms, choose the right things to do.

"Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life..."

The peace that is being written about here is the kind of peace that brings pieces together into a whole, even at the level of the mind. That is the kind of unity that comes as we share experiences and thoughts in community. And the phrase "work at" means "to chase." This kind of peace we need to pursue aggressively as well as a holy life, that comes through faith and the power of the Holy Spirit working in the heart.

"Look after each other..."

The phrase "look after" gives the sense that we are all expected to keep our eye on each other and care for one another. Not to judge or shame, but to support one another as we face challenges and even fail. This will create an environment where falling away from God will be difficult.

"Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you..."

It is inevitable that in a community, at some point, trouble will spring up. It can't be avoided. The author admits this reality but instructs the believers to not allow bitterness to take hold and threaten the unity that exists. That is why it is necessary to forgive and work issues out as soon as they pop up. Nothing destroys a community quicker than unresolved resentment that is allowed to fester.

"Make sure that no one is immoral or godless..."

You may be wondering how a community can stop this from happening. Well there is only one way that I know of to inoculate yourself from becoming immoral and godless: be in an intimate relationship with Jesus. So the best thing a community can do is to encourage and help everyone pursue that kind of a relationship.

- 1. Which of the above instructions resonates with you?**
- 2. How can you apply these instructions in your life?**
- 3. Who in your life could be blessed by hearing these instructions?**

WEEK 6: THU (Hebrews 12:18-24)

You have not come to a physical mountain, to a place of flaming fire, darkness, gloom, and whirlwind, as the Israelites did at Mount Sinai.

For they heard an awesome trumpet blast and a voice so terrible that they begged God to stop speaking. They staggered back under God's command: "If even an animal touches the

mountain, it must be stoned to death.” Moses himself was so frightened at the sight that he said, “I am terrified and trembling.”

No, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to countless thousands of angels in a joyful gathering. You have come to the assembly of God’s firstborn children, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God himself, who is the judge over all things. You have come to the spirits of the righteous ones in heaven who have now been made perfect. You have come to Jesus, the one who mediates the new covenant between God and people, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks of forgiveness instead of crying out for vengeance like the blood of Abel.

There is quite a contrast in these passages. First, we are reminded of the experience the Israelites had when they came out of Egypt and came into the presence of God. It wasn’t that great. God’s voice was so powerful it was painful to hear. His power was so great it brought fear into His people. Even Moses, who had already experienced God in the desert and in Egypt was scared out of his sandals. God was an intimidating presence that struck fear in the hearts of all who came before Him. Many thought they would die.

Now compare that to what the author of Hebrews says was the reality of the believers of his time. There is joy in those gathering before the Lord. They are the perfect children of God, and that declaration is made by the judge himself. They gather before Jesus, who is interceding for them and offering forgiveness for all. What a difference!

When the people heard these words it must have brought them so much hope, especially to those who were considering giving up on the whole “Jesus” thing. Yes, things were getting difficult and scary, but they now could stand in front of a loving God who was going to forgive them, cleanse them with the blood of Jesus, and make them perfect. Those words were not just for them. They are for you, too.

- 1. What are you most looking forward to when you think about heaven?**
- 2. Is there any part of God that scares you? Why?**
- 3. Are you comfortable being in the presence of God? Why or why not?**

WEEK 6: FRI (Hebrews 12:25-29)

Be careful that you do not refuse to listen to the One who is speaking. For if the people of Israel did not escape when they refused to listen to Moses, the earthly messenger, we will certainly not escape if we reject the One who speaks to us from heaven! When God spoke from Mount Sinai his voice shook the earth, but now he makes another promise: “Once again I will shake not only the earth but the heavens also.” This means that all of creation will be shaken and removed, so that only unshakable things will remain.

Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe. For our God is a devouring fire.

When we speak of the end of the world, the last days, there sometimes can be fear connected to that subject. It makes sense. Some of the language used in describing the end of days can be aggressive and scary.

This passage gives us a small taste of the end when God says:

“Once again I will shake not only the earth but the heavens also.” Hebrews 12:26

There will be a time when the whole earth will be shaken and only the unshakeable will be standing. The eternal, the good is all that will be left. Depending on how you see your life, your morality, or your relationship with God, that thought brings you hope or dread.

The good news is that it hasn't happened yet. I don't know when it will happen but I know that there is still time to do something about it. And here is the key:

Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe. For our God is a devouring fire. Hebrews 12:28-29
It is true that God is a devouring fire but there is one thing that will not be devoured: the Kingdom of God. And everyone who accepts Jesus as their high priest and Saviour is part of that kingdom. And there is still time for you to be in that unshakeable kingdom.

Choose Jesus today as your savior. Ask him into your life. Give him your heart. Choose the better way and be part of that Unshakeable Kingdom.

- 1. Does thinking about the end times scare you or give you hope? Why?**
- 2. How can your church help you take the step of giving Jesus your heart?**
- 3. Take some time to pray, thanking God for making it possible for you to be part of His "Unshakable Kingdom."**