

The Book of Hebrews, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 6: The Danger of Falling Away; God's Sure Promise

Hebrews 6:1-20

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson contains one of the two great warning passages of Hebrews, and it must be handled both soberly and pastorally. The doctrinal stakes are high. The writer describes people who were enlightened, who tasted the heavenly gift, who shared in the Holy Spirit, and who tasted the goodness of God's word, and he warns that if such people fall away, they cannot easily be restored. The most natural reading is that these are genuine partakers of God's grace, not mere pretenders. This passage therefore stands directly against the teaching that a truly saved person can never be lost. The warning would be hollow if apostasy were impossible. Your aim is to let the warning carry its full weight, to identify clearly who is being described, and to refuse the common move of explaining the danger away.

At the same time, the passage is framed by deep assurance, and the teacher must hold both together as the writer does. Immediately after the warning, the writer expresses confidence that his readers belong to salvation, and he grounds their hope in the absolute reliability of God's promise and oath. The hope of the believer is a sure and steadfast anchor, not because falling away is impossible, but because God cannot lie and Jesus has gone ahead as our forerunner into God's presence. The biblical balance is neither presumption nor despair, but persevering faith that takes the warning seriously and clings to the anchor.

There is also a clear formational thrust. The chapter opens with a call to leave spiritual infancy and press on to maturity, and it commends practical love and service while urging the readers not to grow sluggish. So aim to send students home with three things: a healthy and sober fear of drifting away from grace, a settled confidence in the unchanging promise of God for all who keep holding fast, and a renewed resolve to grow up and keep serving. The warning and the anchor are not in tension; together they are God's means of keeping His people safe to the end.

Question 1

Student Question:

In verses 1 through 3 the writer urges his readers to leave the elementary teachings and press on to maturity. What are the basics he lists, and what does it mean to move beyond them toward maturity without abandoning them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

List the foundations the writer names: repentance from dead works, faith toward God, instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. These are genuine basics of the faith, the ground floor of Christian understanding. The writer does not despise them; he calls them the foundation.

Clarify what leaving them means. To leave the elementary teachings is not to discard or deny them, any more than building a house means demolishing the foundation. It means not staying perpetually at the starting point, but building upward toward maturity. The readers had stalled on the basics; the writer calls them to grow.

Apply this to spiritual growth generally. Maturity is not the abandonment of foundational truths but their deepening and application. A mature believer still rests on repentance, faith, and the hope of resurrection, but has grown in understanding, discernment, and Christlikeness. Encourage the class to see growth as moving forward from a foundation, not away from it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The foundational teachings of the faith as a true starting point.
- Maturity as building on the foundation, not abandoning it.
- The danger of perpetual spiritual infancy.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the writer call these teachings the foundation rather than the whole house?
- What does it mean to press on to maturity without leaving the basics behind?
- Where have you stalled on the foundations when God is calling you higher?

Question 2

Student Question:

The writer calls his readers to grow up and press on rather than stay forever on the foundations. What is one foundational truth you have known for years that you sense God wants to deepen into maturity in your actual life, not just your knowledge?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question moves growth from information to transformation. Many believers know the foundational truths intellectually but have not let them mature into lived reality. Knowing about repentance is not the same as a repentant life; knowing about faith is not the same as a trusting heart.

Encourage students to identify one truth they have long known but not yet fully lived. Perhaps they know God forgives but still live in shame, or know God provides but still live in anxiety, or know they are called to love but hold a grudge. The gap between knowledge and life is where maturity grows.

Press for one concrete area. Maturity comes as a known truth sinks down into the actual decisions, relationships, and habits of life. Encourage students to choose one truth and ask how it would reshape their living this week if it became more than knowledge.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between knowing a truth and living it.
- Maturity as the deepening of known truth into life.

- Honest assessment of the gap between belief and practice.

Discussion Prompts

- What truth do you know well in your head but not yet in your life?
- What would it look like for that truth to mature into actual practice?
- What has kept it from taking deeper root until now?

Question 3

Student Question:

In verses 7 and 8 the writer pictures two fields that drink the same rain, one producing a useful crop and one producing thorns. What does this image teach about how people can receive the same grace from God and yet end very differently?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Unfold the agricultural image. Two pieces of ground receive the identical rain, the same gift from heaven. One drinks it in and produces a useful crop and receives God's blessing. The other drinks the same rain but yields only thorns and thistles, and is worthless, near to being cursed, its end to be burned.

Draw the lesson the writer intends. The difference is not in the rain but in the response. God's grace comes to people genuinely and generously, but grace received is meant to bear fruit. To receive grace and produce only thorns is to come under judgment, not because the grace was lacking, but because it was wasted.

Apply it as a mirror. The image invites self-examination rather than judgment of others. Each of us has received real grace, real teaching, real opportunity. The question is what crop our soil is producing. This connects the warning of the chapter to the call to bear fruit and press on to maturity.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Grace genuinely received that is meant to bear fruit.
- The difference between fruitful and fruitless responses to the same grace.
- Judgment as the end of grace received but wasted.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the writer stress that both fields received the same rain?
- What does it mean to turn God's grace into a useful crop?
- What kind of harvest is your soil producing from the grace you have received?

Question 4

Student Question:

The two fields received identical rain but produced opposite harvests. What is the rain God has poured into your life, and what would it look like this week to turn that grace into a useful crop rather than letting it go to thorns?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question personalizes the image of the fields. Encourage students to take inventory of the rain in their own lives: the gospel they have heard, the Scriptures they own, the teaching they have received, the church family around them, the spiritual gifts and opportunities God has given. Most believers have received far more grace than they have stewarded.

Then turn to fruitfulness. Grace is not meant to pool and stagnate but to produce a crop, a life of love, service, holiness, and witness. Ask what it would look like, this week, to convert some specific grace into fruit, rather than letting it go to waste.

Keep it concrete and hopeful. The point is not guilt over wasted grace but a fresh resolve to bear fruit. Encourage one specific action, a way of serving, a truth to obey, a relationship to invest in, that turns received grace into a useful harvest.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Stewardship of the grace God has poured into our lives.
- The call to bear fruit rather than waste grace.
- Concrete fruitfulness as the proper response to grace.

Discussion Prompts

- What grace has God poured most abundantly into your life?
- How might that grace be going to thorns rather than fruit?
- What is one specific way you will bear fruit from it this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Verses 9 and 10 show the writer's confidence that his readers belong to salvation, because God is not unjust to forget their work and the love they have shown. How does this passage hold together a severe warning and genuine assurance, and what does that teach us about both?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Point out the deliberate turn in verse 9. Having issued a severe warning, the writer immediately says, though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things, things that belong to salvation. The same writer who warns also assures, and both are sincere.

Explain the basis of his assurance. It is not a blanket guarantee detached from their lives, but a confidence rooted in the evidence of grace at work in them: their labor and the love they have shown to the saints, which God will not forget. Their fruit gives ground for hope.

Teach the balance this models. Warning and assurance are not contradictory but complementary. The warning keeps us from presumption; the assurance keeps us from despair.

A healthy believer takes the warning seriously and rests in the assurance, holding both as the writer does. This is the biblical posture toward our security: sober vigilance joined to confident hope.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The union of severe warning and genuine assurance.
- Assurance grounded in the evidence of grace at work, not in presumption.
- The balance of vigilance and confidence in the believer's life.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the writer move so quickly from warning to assurance?
- On what basis does he feel confident about his readers?
- How can you hold both warning and assurance in a healthy way?

Question 6

Student Question:

The writer commends his readers for serving the saints and encourages them not to grow sluggish but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Where are you tempted to grow sluggish or weary in doing good, and what would help you keep going?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question addresses the weariness that creeps into long obedience. The writer urges his readers not to be sluggish but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Even faithful people grow tired of doing good when the harvest is delayed.

Help students name where weariness has set in: in serving others, in a hard relationship, in a ministry that feels thankless, in waiting on a promise that has not yet come. Naming the specific place of fatigue allows for honest encouragement.

Point to the remedy the writer offers: faith and patience, and the example of those who have persevered before us. Endurance is sustained by keeping our eyes on the promise and drawing courage from those who have finished the race. Encourage one concrete way to renew perseverance in a place of weariness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The weariness that comes with long obedience and delayed reward.
- Faith and patience as the means of perseverance.
- The encouragement of imitating faithful examples.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you most tempted to grow weary in doing good?
- What promise are you waiting on that tests your patience?
- Who is an example of faith and patience you can draw courage from?

Question 7

Student Question:

In verses 13 through 18 the writer points to God's promise and oath to Abraham, two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie. What does this teach about the certainty of God's promises and the foundation of our hope?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Explain the logic of the oath. When God made His promise to Abraham, He confirmed it with an oath, swearing by Himself because there was no one greater to swear by. People swear by something greater to guarantee their word; God, having no greater, swore by His own being.

Identify the two unchangeable things in verse 18: God's promise and God's oath. In both it is impossible for God to lie. The certainty of our hope does not rest on our feelings or our performance but on the unchanging character of a God who cannot break His word.

Apply this to the believer's assurance. The God who promised to save all who come to Him through Christ has bound Himself by promise and oath. For those who flee to Him for refuge, this is strong encouragement to hold fast. Our hope is as reliable as God Himself, which is to say, completely reliable. This is the assurance that balances the warning of the chapter.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The absolute reliability of God's promise, confirmed by oath.
- The unchanging character of God as the foundation of hope.
- Assurance grounded in God's faithfulness for those who hold fast.

Discussion Prompts

- Why did God confirm His promise with an oath?
- How does the impossibility of God lying strengthen your hope?
- What promise of God do you most need to rest on right now?

Question 8

Student Question:

Verse 19 calls this hope a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. When the storms of life are tossing you, what does it mean practically to drop the anchor of hope into the promises of God rather than into your circumstances?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Develop the rich image of the anchor. A ship in a storm is steadied not by anything on board but by an anchor that grips something solid beyond itself. The writer says our hope is an anchor that reaches into the inner place behind the curtain, into the very presence of God where Jesus has gone ahead of us.

Help students see where they tend to drop their anchor. When storms come, we instinctively look for security in changing circumstances, in our own strength, in other people, or in a turn of fortune. These are unstable holds that shift with the storm.

Apply the alternative. To anchor the soul in God's promises is to fix our security on something that does not move, the unchanging God and the finished work of Christ who has entered God's presence for us. Encourage students to identify a current storm and to consciously drop their anchor into a specific promise of God rather than into their circumstances.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Hope as an anchor that grips the presence of God.
- The instability of anchoring the soul in circumstances.
- Fixing the soul on God's promises and Christ's finished work.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you tend to drop your anchor when storms come?
- What does it mean to anchor your hope in God's presence instead?
- What specific promise can you fix your soul on in your current storm?

Question 9

Student Question:

In verses 4 through 6 the writer warns that those who were once enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit, and then fell away cannot easily be restored. Some teach that a truly saved person can never be lost. Using this passage, how would you explain the seriousness of falling away, who is being described, and how this warning fits with the assurance and hope the rest of the chapter offers?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson, so handle it with care, clarity, and a pastoral spirit. Begin with the description in verses 4 and 5, and let it stand at full strength. The people in view were once enlightened, they tasted the heavenly gift, they shared in the Holy Spirit, and they tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come. This is the language of real participation in God's grace, not the language of mere pretenders or distant observers. The most natural reading is that these were genuine believers who had truly received what God gives.

State plainly what the warning says. If such people fall away, it is impossible to restore them again to repentance, because they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and holding Him up to contempt. The seriousness is staggering. To fall away after tasting genuine grace is to side with those who crucified Christ, treating His sacrifice with open contempt. The writer is describing a deliberate, decisive abandonment of Christ, not a stumble or a season of doubt.

Now address the teaching that a truly saved person can never be lost. This passage will not allow it. A warning against falling away has force only if falling away is genuinely possible for the people warned. If the saved could never be lost, the writer would be warning believers against

something that could not happen to them, which empties the passage of meaning. Scripture elsewhere confirms this danger, as when Paul warns that those seeking to be justified by law have fallen from grace, and when Peter describes those who escape the corruption of the world and then become entangled again so that their last state is worse than the first. The consistent witness is that salvation is preserved through ongoing faith and faithfulness, and that it can be abandoned.

Clarify what falling away is and is not, so the class is neither careless nor terrified. The passage does not describe a believer who sins, doubts, or stumbles and then repents; for such there is always mercy at the throne of grace. It describes a settled, willful turning away from Christ, a renouncing of the grace once embraced. The reason such a person cannot be restored is not that God's mercy runs out, but that the one who has knowingly trampled the only sacrifice for sins has rejected the very thing that could save them. As long as a heart is tender enough to want to return, that heart has not committed this final apostasy.

Finally, show how the warning fits with the assurance that follows. The writer does not leave his readers in fear. He immediately expresses confidence in better things for them, and he anchors their hope in God's unchangeable promise and oath. The two belong together. The warning keeps us from presumption; the promise keeps us from despair. The believer who keeps fleeing to Christ for refuge, holding fast the anchor of hope, has every reason for deep and settled assurance. The way to heed this warning is not to live in dread, but to keep holding fast to the One who cannot lie, and who has gone ahead of us into the presence of God as our forerunner.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The warning describes genuine partakers of grace, not mere pretenders.
- The grave seriousness of deliberately falling away from Christ.
- A clear, scriptural answer to the teaching that the saved can never be lost.
- The distinction between stumbling, for which there is mercy, and willful, final apostasy.
- Salvation preserved through ongoing faith and faithfulness, not an automatic guarantee.
- The warning and the assurance held together as God's means of keeping His people safe.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it most natural to read this warning as describing real believers?
- How does this passage answer the teaching that a Christian can never be lost?
- How would you reassure a tender-hearted believer who fears they have fallen away?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole chapter. The writer wants you both to take the danger of falling away seriously and to hold fast to the unshakable hope anchored in Christ. Name one specific way you will guard against drifting and one specific way you will lay hold of the hope set before you this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the chapter's two hands, the warning and the anchor, and asks for a response to each. The whole chapter is designed to produce neither presumption nor despair, but persevering faith that is both watchful and confident.

Help students name one guard against drifting, perhaps addressing a place of sluggishness, bearing fruit from neglected grace, or pressing on from a stalled foundation. Then help them name one way to lay hold of hope, perhaps resting their soul on a specific promise of God, or fixing their anchor in the presence of Christ in a current storm.

Close by returning to the chapter's final image. Our hope enters the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf. Send students home sobered by the warning, steadied by the anchor, and resolved to keep holding fast to the One who cannot lie.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Persevering faith that is both watchful and confident.
- Guarding against drift while laying hold of hope.
- The anchor of hope fixed in the presence of Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- What is one specific way you will guard against drifting this week?
- What is one specific way you will lay hold of the hope set before you?
- How does holding both the warning and the anchor change the way you walk with God?