

Living by Faith, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 11: The Just Shall Live by Faith: Not Shrinking Back

Hebrews 10:35–39

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson carries some of the heaviest doctrinal weight in the entire study, and it must be handled with both clarity and warmth. The passage sits at the hinge of Hebrews, where the writer turns from a long warning about falling away (Hebrews 10:26–31) toward the great roll call of faith in chapter 11. The quotation in verses 37–38 comes from Habakkuk 2:3–4, the same text Paul leans on in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11, ‘the just shall live by faith.’ But notice that Hebrews completes the quotation in a way those readings do not always emphasize: ‘and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.’ The doctrinal stakes are unmistakable. The God who declares that His righteous one lives by faith says in the very same breath that shrinking back is possible and is met with His displeasure. To live by faith is not a single past transaction but a persevering life.

This is where you will need to teach plainly against the popular doctrine of ‘once saved, always saved,’ and against the Calvinist notion of the guaranteed perseverance of the saints. The text simply will not bear the idea that a genuine believer cannot fall away. The ‘righteous one’ who lives by faith is the very one who could shrink back. The writer addresses Christians, not pretenders, and warns them that they can be ‘destroyed.’ Set this passage alongside Hebrews 3:12–14, Hebrews 6:4–6, Galatians 5:4, and 2 Peter 2:20–22, and the consistent teaching of the New Testament emerges: a Christian’s salvation is real and secure as long as it is held by living, enduring, obedient faith, and it can be forfeited by abandoning that faith. Salvation is preserved not by a one-time decision that locks the door behind us, but through ongoing trust in and faithfulness to Christ. Teach this directly. Do not soften it into vagueness, and do not let it pass unnamed.

Yet the spiritual-formation aim here is just as important as the doctrinal one, and the tone must be pastoral throughout. This passage is not designed to leave believers anxious and white-knuckled. It is designed to keep weary saints in the race. The aim is to form people who guard their confidence, who endure under pressure, who fix their eyes on the certain coming of Christ, and who refuse to drift back when faith grows costly. The God who warns also assures: He has no pleasure in those who shrink back precisely because He delights in His people and wants them home. Help your class hold both truths at once. We must take the warning seriously, and we may take great comfort that the Lord is near, the reward is real, and He is faithful to finish what He began in all who keep trusting Him.

Question 1

Student Question: *In verse 35 the writer says, 'Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.' What does it mean to 'throw away' confidence, and what does this language suggest about how a believer loses ground with God, whether suddenly or gradually?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the vivid verb. The word translated 'throw away' pictures discarding something as worthless, casting it off the way a runner might fling away a garment, or a tired soldier might drop his shield. The 'confidence' (parresia) is the bold, open assurance these believers once had before God and before the world. The writer is not describing someone who has it stolen from them; he is warning against someone who lets it go. That detail matters, because it locates real responsibility in the believer.

Notice that the loss can be active or passive, sudden or slow. One can hurl confidence away in a dramatic act of denial, but the original readers were in more danger of simply setting it down, easing off, going quiet under pressure until the boldness quietly leaked out. Help the class see that drifting is just as real a danger as defecting. Most people who lose their footing with God do not slam a door; they wander out an open one.

Press the encouragement woven into the warning. The confidence is worth keeping because it 'has a great reward.' The writer is not merely scolding; he is reminding weary people that what they hold is precious. When something feels costly to keep, we are tempted to undervalue it. Part of the cure for drift is to remember what our faith is actually worth.

Bring it home gently. Ask the class to consider that guarding the heart is an active, ongoing work. We do not keep our confidence by accident. It is held by deliberate attention: staying near the word, near the assembly, near prayer, near God's people. Set up the theme of endurance that the next verse will name outright.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Confidence (parresia) as the believer's bold assurance before God, something to be guarded
- The believer's real responsibility in keeping or casting off confidence
- Loss of ground with God as often gradual drift rather than sudden defection
- The great reward attached to persevering faith as motivation to hold on
- Guarding the heart as an active, ongoing work rather than a passive state

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between having confidence stolen and throwing it away?
- Why is gradual drift often more dangerous than a dramatic departure?
- What practices actually help a believer guard their confidence over the long haul?

Question 2

Student Question: *Be honest with yourself. Is there an area where your own confidence before God feels worn thin right now? What has been wearing it down?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first self-examining question, and it follows hard on the doctrinal one by design. The aim is not to manufacture guilt but to invite honesty. Many faithful believers carry seasons of worn-thin confidence, and naming it is the beginning of recovering it. Set a tone where people can admit weariness without fear of being judged as unspiritual.

Help the class trace causes. Confidence wears thin for many reasons: unconfessed sin that has dulled the conscience, prolonged suffering that has gone unanswered, disappointment with God or with His people, simple exhaustion, or the slow erosion of neglected spiritual habits. Different roots call for different responses, so the diagnosis matters.

Move toward hope. The good news of this very passage is that worn confidence can be renewed, and that God draws near to the weary rather than discarding them. Remind the class that the writer is addressing real Christians who are tired, not telling them they are lost, but calling them back to bold trust. Encourage one honest, concrete acknowledgment as a first step toward restoration.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honest self-examination as a healthy part of faithful discipleship
- Common causes of worn confidence: sin, suffering, disappointment, exhaustion, neglect
- The difference between a tired believer and a faithless one
- God's nearness to the weary rather than His abandonment of them
- Naming the struggle as the first step toward renewed confidence

Discussion Prompts

- Where does your confidence before God feel thinnest right now?
- What specifically has been wearing it down in this season?
- What would it look like to bring that honestly to God this week?

Question 3

Student Question: *Verse 36 says, 'For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.' Why does the writer tie receiving the promise to enduring and doing God's will, rather than only to a moment of initial belief?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Start with the plain logic of the verse. The writer does not say 'you had need of a decision,' but 'you have need of endurance.' The Greek word (*hupomone*) means a steadfast remaining under, the capacity to bear up and keep going under weight. He places this endurance between doing

the will of God and receiving the promise. The promise is received by those who endure in obedience, not merely by those who once began.

This is an important place to clarify the relationship between faith and obedience without slipping into either error. The writer is not teaching that we earn the promise by works. He is teaching that genuine faith perseveres and obeys, and that the promise is laid hold of at the end of a faithful course, not banked and forgotten after the start. The whole letter has been building this: we share in Christ 'if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end' (Hebrews 3:14).

Help the class feel why this is realistic and kind rather than burdensome. Anything worth having asks endurance of us, from a marriage to a calling to a race. The Christian life is not a sprint to a decision but a long obedience in the same direction. God does not despise the weak; He strengthens those who keep walking, and the promise waits for them at the finish.

Tie it forward. This sets up the great theme of the next two verses and of chapter 11, where every hero of faith is commended not for a single moment but for a life of trusting God through difficulty. Endurance is simply faith over time.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Endurance (hupomone) as steadfast remaining under pressure, not mere passive waiting
- Receiving the promise tied to enduring obedience, not only to initial belief
- Faith and obedience held together without teaching salvation by works
- Holding our original confidence firm to the end (Hebrews 3:14)
- The Christian life as a long obedience in the same direction

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the writer emphasize endurance rather than only a starting decision?
- How is enduring faith different from trying to earn the promise by works?
- Where is endurance most needed in your walk right now?

Question 4

Student Question: *Where in your life is God most clearly calling you to endurance right now, to keep doing His will when it would be easier to coast or quit?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the truth of endurance toward each person's actual life. Help the class move past the abstract idea of perseverance toward the specific places where it is being tested: a hard marriage, a wayward child, a long illness, a discouraging ministry, a temptation that keeps returning, a faithfulness no one sees or applauds.

Encourage them to distinguish between coasting and quitting. Few believers consciously decide to abandon Christ, but many quietly coast, doing the minimum, going through the motions, letting the engagement of faith idle. Endurance is not just refusing to quit; it is continuing to actively do the will of God when the doing has grown hard.

Offer hope and help. Remind the class that endurance is not produced by sheer willpower but is fed by the means God has given: His word, prayer, the Lord's Supper, and the fellowship and encouragement of the church (Hebrews 10:24–25, just before our passage). We were never meant to endure alone. Invite them to name one place of needed endurance and one source of strength for it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Specific arenas where endurance is tested in real life
- The difference between coasting and actively doing the will of God
- Endurance fed by God's means of grace rather than by willpower alone
- The role of the church in helping one another endure (Hebrews 10:24–25)
- Faithfulness in unseen and unapplauded obedience

Discussion Prompts

- Where is God calling you to endure rather than coast or quit?
- What makes that particular faithfulness hard to sustain?
- Who or what helps you keep going when you grow weary?

Question 5

Student Question: *Verse 37 says, 'Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay.' How is the promise of Christ's certain return meant to strengthen weary believers, and how does living in light of His coming differ from living as though this world is all there is?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Anchor the class in the certainty the verse proclaims. 'The coming one will come and will not delay.' To people who feel that the road is long and the wait is endless, the writer brings the steadying word that the Lord's return is sure and, from heaven's vantage, near. The waiting has a horizon. The race has a finish line, and a Judge who is also our Savior stands at the end of it.

Show how this reorders endurance. Weariness often comes from feeling that our faithfulness disappears into a void, that no one sees and nothing comes of it. The promise of Christ's coming says otherwise: every act of enduring faith is moving toward a real and glorious meeting with the Lord, who will reward those who have kept trusting Him. Hope of the coming is fuel for the endurance just commanded.

Draw the contrast the question asks for. To live as though this world is all there is, is to let visible pressures, comforts, and disappointments have the final say. To live in light of Christ's coming is to make decisions that only make sense if He is real and His return is certain. It steadies us in suffering, loosens our grip on the world, and gives weight to obedience that the world calls foolish.

Guard the teaching here. Be careful to keep the simple New Testament hope of Christ's bodily return and judgment, without drifting into speculative timelines or earthly-reign schemes. Christ reigns now from heaven, His kingdom was established and His church began at Pentecost (Acts 2), and we wait not for an earthly kingdom but for His return to take His people home. Keep the focus where the text keeps it: He is coming, He will not delay, so do not throw away your confidence.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The certainty and nearness of Christ's return as an anchor for the weary
- Hope of the coming as fuel for present endurance
- Living in light of eternity versus living as though this world is all there is
- Christ reigning now from heaven, His kingdom and church established at Pentecost (Acts 2)
- The simple New Testament hope of Christ's bodily return and judgment, free of speculative schemes

Discussion Prompts

- How does the certainty of Christ's return change the way you endure?
- What would look different in your week if His coming felt truly near?
- Where are you tempted to live as though this world is all there is?

Question 6

Student Question: *When you imagine standing before the Lord at His coming, what rises in you, more hope or more fear? What does your honest answer reveal about where your confidence rests?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is a searching self-examination question, so handle it with great care. Some in the class will feel mostly hope, some mostly fear, and both answers can be revealing. The aim is not to shame the fearful or flatter the confident, but to help each person see where their assurance actually rests.

Help them interpret their reaction wisely. Fear can come from a tender conscience aware of real sin that needs to be addressed, and that is a mercy to be acted on. But fear can also come from a misplaced confidence that rests on personal performance rather than on Christ, leaving a person never sure they have done enough. And ease can be healthy assurance grounded in

trusting obedience, or it can be a careless presumption that has stopped taking the warnings of Scripture seriously.

Lead the class to the balance this whole letter strikes. We are meant neither to be casual about the warnings nor to be paralyzed by dread. The believer who is walking in living, obedient faith may have real confidence before the Lord (1 John 4:17), while still taking heed lest he fall (1 Corinthians 10:12). True assurance rests not on our own strength but on the faithfulness of Christ, held by a faith that keeps trusting and obeying Him. Encourage honest reflection and, where needed, a fresh return to Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honest reflection on hope and fear regarding the Lord's coming
- Fear from a tender conscience versus fear from misplaced, performance-based confidence
- Healthy assurance versus careless presumption
- Confidence before the Lord grounded in Christ, not in self (1 John 4:17)
- Taking heed lest we fall while still resting in Christ (1 Corinthians 10:12)

Discussion Prompts

- When you picture standing before the Lord, what rises in you first?
- What does that reaction tell you about where your confidence rests?
- Is there a step of return or renewed trust your honest answer is calling for?

Question 7

Student Question: *Verse 38 quotes God Himself: 'My righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.' What does it mean that 'the just shall live by faith,' and why is faith described as something we live by rather than something we did once?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Give this verse careful attention, because it is the doctrinal heart of the passage and the bridge to chapter 11. The quotation is from Habakkuk 2:4, words God spoke to a people waiting through a long and painful delay. 'My righteous one shall live by faith.' Notice the present, ongoing sense. Faith is not pictured as a single past act that the righteous one performed, but as the very atmosphere in which he continually lives.

Draw out the phrase 'live by faith.' Just as the body lives by breathing, not by having breathed once, the righteous person lives by an ongoing, daily trust in God. Faith is the sustained posture of the whole life, expressed in continued trust and obedience. This is exactly the picture chapter 11 will paint, where men and women trust God across decades and through hardship, not in a single moment but over a lifetime.

Now hold up the second half of the verse, which the class must not be allowed to skip. The same God who says the righteous live by faith adds, 'and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.' The shrinking back is set as the opposite of living by faith. It is the slow withdrawal, the loosening grip, the quiet retreat from bold trust. And God says plainly that He takes no pleasure in it. This is sobering, and it is meant to be.

Help the class feel the weight without losing the warmth. God is not cold here; the language of pleasure and displeasure is the language of a heart that cares deeply. He longs for His people to keep trusting Him because He loves them and wants them home. The call to live by faith is the call of a Father, not the threat of a tyrant. Set this up carefully, because the next question will press directly into what it means that a believer can shrink back.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The just living by faith as an ongoing, daily posture, not a single past act
- Faith as the atmosphere of the whole Christian life, expressed in continued trust and obedience
- Shrinking back as the opposite of living by faith: gradual withdrawal of trust
- God's displeasure as the language of a caring heart, not cold rejection
- Habakkuk 2:4 as the seedbed of 'the just shall live by faith' and the bridge to Hebrews 11

Discussion Prompts

- Why is faith described as something we live by, like breathing, rather than a one-time act?
- What does shrinking back look like as the opposite of living by faith?
- How does seeing God's displeasure as the concern of a loving Father change how you hear this verse?

Question 8

Student Question: *What does it look like, in your actual week, to 'live by faith' rather than merely to have believed at some point in the past?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examination question makes the great phrase practical. Help the class move from the idea of living by faith to its texture in ordinary days. Living by faith shows up in how we handle money, fear, conflict, temptation, time, and the quiet hours no one sees. It is faith worked out in the dishes and the inbox and the difficult conversation, not just in the worship assembly.

Press gently against a common error. Some believers anchor their assurance entirely in a past moment, a baptism, a decision, a feeling, while their present life shows little ongoing trust in God. The text will not let us rest there. To live by faith means today's trust, today's obedience, today's leaning on the Lord. The past event matters, but the verse calls for a present life.

Keep it hopeful and concrete. Invite each person to name one ordinary arena where faith needs to come alive this week, and one specific way it would show. Living by faith is built from small, repeated acts of trust far more than from dramatic gestures. Encourage them that God meets us in the daily and grows steady faith one ordinary choice at a time.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Living by faith as a present, daily reality woven through ordinary life
- The danger of anchoring assurance only in a past moment with no present trust
- Faith expressed in money, fear, conflict, temptation, and unseen hours
- Small, repeated acts of trust as the substance of a faithful life
- God meeting and growing us in the ordinary

Discussion Prompts

- Where in your ordinary week does faith most need to come alive?
- What is one concrete way living by faith would change that area?
- How do you keep your faith a present reality and not just a past event?

Question 9

Student Question: *Hold verse 38 and verse 39 together: 'My righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.' Some teach that once a person is truly saved they can never be lost, no matter what follows. How do these verses speak to that idea? Can a genuine believer shrink back, fall away, and be lost, and what does this passage teach about how a Christian's salvation is finally preserved (compare Hebrews 3:12-14; Hebrews 6:4-6; Hebrews 10:26-31; Galatians 5:4; 2 Peter 2:20-22)?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson, and it deserves your fullest and most careful attention. Teach it plainly, but teach it with a pastor's heart. The popular doctrine often called 'once saved, always saved,' and its more developed cousin, the Calvinist teaching of the guaranteed perseverance of the saints, holds that a person who has been truly saved cannot finally be lost, whatever they later do. The plain words of this passage cannot be made to fit that idea, and we should let the text speak.

Look closely at who is in view. The 'righteous one' of verse 38 is God's own, the justified believer who lives by faith. And it is this very person of whom God says, 'if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.' The warning is not aimed at outsiders or pretenders; it is aimed at the righteous, the believer. Verse 39 then sets two real possibilities side by side: those who 'shrink back and are destroyed,' and those who 'have faith and preserve their souls.' The word translated 'destroyed' is the language of ruin and loss, not mere disappointment. The text

plainly allows that a believer can move from the first group toward the second's opposite. To deny that a Christian can shrink back is to erase the very warning God is giving.

Set this passage in the company the question names, because Hebrews and the wider New Testament say the same thing repeatedly. Hebrews 3:12–14 warns brothers against 'an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God,' and says we share in Christ only 'if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.' Hebrews 6:4–6 speaks of those who were genuinely enlightened, who shared in the Holy Spirit, and who then fell away. Hebrews 10:26–31, immediately before our passage, warns of deliberate, ongoing sin after receiving the knowledge of the truth. Galatians 5:4 says bluntly that one can be 'severed from Christ' and 'fallen away from grace.' And 2 Peter 2:20–22 describes people who escaped the corruption of the world through Christ and then were again entangled and overcome, ending worse than they began. These are not warnings to unbelievers; they are warnings to the saved. Scripture does not waste breath warning people against a danger that cannot exist.

Now teach the positive truth clearly, because the goal is assurance built on the right foundation, not anxiety. The Christian's salvation is real and secure, but it is secured in Christ and held by a living, enduring faith, not by a one-time decision that locks the outcome regardless of how we then live. Faith is not a single past event but a persevering life: 'the just shall live by faith.' The same faith by which we first came to Christ, hearing the gospel, believing Him to be Lord and Christ, repenting, confessing Him, and being baptized into Him for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27), is the faith we are now called to continue in to the end. We preserve our souls not by our own unaided strength, but by remaining in trusting obedience to the One who is faithful to keep all who keep trusting Him.

Finally, frame the whole matter pastorally, the way the writer does. He does not leave his readers trembling; he says, 'we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.' That is confidence, not dread. The right response to this truth is not constant fear of losing salvation by accident, but a settled, watchful, hopeful determination to keep trusting and following Jesus. God is not looking for a reason to cast His children out; He is calling weary believers to come further up and further in. Take the warning with full seriousness, and take equal comfort that the Lord is near, the reward is great, and He will surely bring home all who do not let go of Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The plain teaching that a genuine believer can shrink back, fall away, and be lost
- The 'righteous one' who lives by faith as the very one warned against shrinking back
- Why 'once saved, always saved' and guaranteed perseverance of the saints cannot fit this text
- The witness of Hebrews 3:12–14; 6:4–6; 10:26–31; Galatians 5:4; 2 Peter 2:20–22
- Salvation preserved through ongoing, enduring faith and obedience, not a one-time decision

- Continuing faith as the same faith by which we first obeyed the gospel (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27)
- Assurance rightly grounded in Christ and a persevering life, producing confidence rather than dread

Discussion Prompts

- Who exactly is warned against shrinking back in verse 38, and why does that matter?
- How do passages like Hebrews 3:12–14 and Galatians 5:4 confirm that a believer can fall away?
- If salvation is preserved through enduring faith, how should that produce confidence rather than constant fear?

Question 10

Student Question: *Looking back over Hebrews 10:35–39 as a whole, name one concrete way Jesus is forming you to keep going rather than shrink back. What is one step of enduring faith He is calling you to take this week?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question gathers the whole lesson and turns it toward transformation. The passage has called us to guard our confidence, to endure in doing God’s will, to live in light of Christ’s certain coming, to keep living by faith, and not to shrink back. Now ask each student to bring it down to one concrete place where Jesus is forming endurance in them.

Encourage specificity over good intentions. Keeping going rather than shrinking back might look like returning to a neglected habit of prayer or the word, restoring an attendance and fellowship that has slipped, facing a temptation with help rather than alone, renewing an obedience that had grown half-hearted, or, for someone who has never yet obeyed the gospel, taking that first step of faith into Christ. The phrase ‘this week’ matters; press for a real next step.

Close by lifting their eyes to Jesus, the One toward whom this whole study moves. He is the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), the very next thing the writer will say after the roll call of chapter 11. We do not endure by gritted teeth alone but by looking to Him who endured before us and who is faithful to finish what He began in us. Pray over the specific steps named, and send the class out with hope, not fear: the Lord is near, the reward is real, and He will bring home all who keep trusting Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Personal application of the whole passage to one concrete area of endurance
- Keeping going expressed in specific, renewed faithfulness this week
- The first step of obeying the gospel for any who have not yet done so
- Jesus as the author and perfecter of faith who enables our endurance (Hebrews 12:2)

- Hope rather than fear as the proper fruit of this lesson

Discussion Prompts

- What one concrete way is Jesus forming you to keep going rather than shrink back?
- What step of enduring faith is He calling you to take this week?
- How can this class pray for and encourage you in that step?