

Living by Faith

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

10:35-39

There is a particular kind of tired that has nothing to do with sleep. It is the weariness of the long road, the ache of a runner somewhere past the middle of the race, when the first burst of energy is long gone and the finish line is nowhere in sight. The legs still move, but the heart keeps whispering, How much further? Is it worth it? Maybe you have felt that in your walk with God. The day you first believed, everything was bright and new. But faith has cost you something since then, and the brightness has dimmed, and quietly, almost without deciding, you have started to wonder whether you can keep going.

The believers who first received the letter to the Hebrews knew that tiredness well. They had once received the gospel with joy. They had endured public shame, the loss of property, the cost of standing with Christ. But years had passed, and the pressure had not let up, and some of them were beginning to drift back toward the safety of the old life they had left. They were not planning to renounce Jesus. They were simply easing off, going quiet, letting the grip of faith loosen one finger at a time. And so the writer leans in close and says something every weary believer needs to hear: Do not throw away your confidence. It still has a great reward.

What follows in these five verses is one of the most honest passages in all of Scripture about what it costs to follow Christ over the long haul, and one of the most hopeful. The writer does not pretend the road is easy. He says plainly that you have need of endurance. But he also reminds us that the One we are waiting for is coming, and will not delay, and that the life God blesses is not the life that starts well but the life that keeps trusting all the way home. The just shall live by faith. Not believe once and coast. Live by faith, day after day, year after year, to the end.

This is a tender lesson, because it speaks to the place where many sincere hearts grow afraid. If a Christian can shrink back, am I safe? Hear the heart of the passage before we begin. These verses are not written to frighten you off the road but to keep you on it. They are the voice of a friend running alongside you, pointing ahead and saying, Do not quit now. The reward is real, the Lord is near, and the God who began this journey in you wants nothing more than to bring you all the way to glory. We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

Group Discussion: What are some of the ordinary, quiet ways that a believer can begin to 'shrink back' from Christ over time, long before anyone would ever say they had fallen away? Why are these slow drifts often harder to notice than a dramatic departure?

Personal Reflection: Think of a season when following Jesus felt costly or wearying for you. What tempted you to ease off or pull back, and what (or who) helped you keep going?

Read Hebrews 10:35–39

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?

6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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)?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 3:12–14, take care lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, for we share in Christ if we hold our original confidence firm to the end; Hebrews 6:11–12, the desire that each one show earnestness to have the full assurance of hope to the end, imitating those who through faith and patience inherit the promises; Galatians 5:4, a sobering word that it is possible to be severed from Christ and fallen away from grace; 2 Peter 2:20–22, the danger of being again entangled and overcome after escaping the corruption of the world through Christ; Philippians 1:6, the hope that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.