

Martin White. 31st August 2008. Hebrews 10:32-39

Persevering into faith.

2 weeks ago I preached about God's Purpose in trials that we go through and talked about the reason God allows us to go through tough times, which is to mature us.

Today I believe God wants me to talk about a similar subject; the process of growing into faith, from Hebrews chapter 10.

I believe that this is a hugely helpful chapter, because it gives us the 'road map' of how to press on through trials and difficulties on to faith.

What is going on with the Hebrews (Jewish Believers) who the letter is addressed to?

They have had more than their share of persecution: Peter and John have been called before the courts; the Apostles have been flogged and imprisoned; and then Stephen has been stoned to death and the Church has been scattered.

They have had many waves of persecution and difficulty and even the word 'scattered' when you think about it, means that many of them must have been separated from their families and community; they had lost property, jobs, respect; and they probably lived day to day with a risk of arrest and with stories and rumours of friends being arrested.

The Book of Hebrews is a letter encouraging people to keep on going towards the New, better Covenant and to press on into faith.

I want to read part of Chapter 10, which is an amazing blueprint of how to press on through trials into faith, then I'll make a few comments about it; and then I want to talk about 2 specific situations that we can apply this blueprint to.

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith,

having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:19-25)

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while,

"He who is coming will come and will not delay.

But my righteous one will live by faith.

**And if he shrinks back,
I will not be pleased with him."**

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved. (Hebrews 10:32-39 NIV)

Specifically the writer is talking about being saved, but the route that he outlines is something that works in any circumstances.

The writer's advice to these Believers who were hard pressed and persecuted was this:

1. Remember the Truth
2. Remember your history with God
3. Press on

Then we will grow in Faith that pleases God

1. Remember the Truth.

The place the writer starts isn't with telling them to keep on going or talking about how they must be feeling; He doesn't start with them at all – he starts by pointing them back to the theological, timeless, unchanging Truth about Jesus:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. (v.19-23 NIV)

If you are having a difficult time, the place you start isn't with you; it's with Him.

All our hope comes from Him. We can come to God because of Him, because of what He has done.

He is our Great High Priest who understands us.

He has dealt with our guilt and sin and shame and has purified us.

He is our Hope; He is Faithful – even if we are hopeless and wobbly!

If our hope is in the right Person – Jesus, then it is not going to be shaken. It is easy to allow our hope to drift towards other things – “if this happens, then I will be okay,” “If I get this job,” “he will be able to help me.”

These aren't necessarily bad things; they're just not enough.

And however hard we try, we will have ups and downs. It's not enough to trust our own abilities.

But Jesus is enough. And if we Hope in Him, we won't be shaken.

The second thing the writer points them to, is that:

If you are a Christian, then you have a **history with God**.

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. (v.32-35 NIV)

- What has He taught you as you have gone through previous trials?
- How has He been faithful?
- What fruit has there been in your life?

Some of the Hebrews had stood through tough times and through these times they had known God's Peace and had been focused onto the Eternal and God's Kingdom.

As they went through these joyfully – they experienced God in the middle of their trial, as well as understanding that the fulfilment of their hope was in the future.

You get to know someone through the sum of your experiences with them; if you know someone well, then you can probably know how they will react, what they will think, what matters to them.

If you're married to that person, then you can probably even finish their sentences!

Some of what we know of God is what you and He have been through before; His faithfulness; His reliability; His patience; His loving discipline; His unconditional kindness.

We preached a long series before the summer about people who encountered Jesus. Well if you're a Christian, you have encountered Him too – you have a history with Him, You have your own stories.

The writer to the Hebrews encouraged them to remember their history – not just to throw it away:

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded (v.35)

The wording means don't just drop it like some disposable rubbish; hold onto it – it's highly precious.

I don't think that this is saying dwell in the past, but it is saying remember the past in order to give you more confidence to help you go through trials and look forward to the future.

I don't know whether there are any nervous flyers here, but if it came over the radio "This is your captain speaking, please be patient with me, but this is my first flight" it may not fill you with confidence; if you have been flying with the captain for many years and he has taken you through all sorts of storms and always brought you in carefully, then that's a reassuring thing!

Jesus has seen me through many storms and has always caught me when I've tripped; He has always guided me when I have needed it, He has never, ever let me down. Once I was young and now I'm old – and I have never seen the righteous forsaken (Ps 37:25)

It's good to remember God's faithfulness: The Israelites set up piles of stones or other monuments – Ebenezers ("The Lord is my help" - 1 Sam 7:12) to remind them where God had given them a victory or spoken to them, or parted the River Jordan, so that as generations to come would see them and ask "What's that for?" and be reminded of God's Faithfulness.

We need Ebenezers in our lives.

Thirdly, once we have got a firm hold of the Truth about God and reminded ourselves of our history with Jesus and His perfect, flawless record of faithfulness towards us, the writer encourages the Hebrews – and us, **to keep on going.**

And one of the reasons for this is the question "What else are we going to do?"

A theme that runs through the book of Hebrews is that of the Israelites leaving Egypt heading towards the Promised Land. The encouragement is for them not

to miss out by being like the Israelites who turned back or grumbled about how it was better in Egypt and as a consequence, died in the desert (chapters 3&4)

We've come out – we don't want to shrink back (to Egypt)

Now the Israelites still had to face their biggest tests once they had left Egypt – survival in the desert with no guarantee of provision – not even slave rations, and with large notorious, walled cities and tribes to conquer with reputations for being giants and fierce warriors; but settling for less or going back meant missing God's Plan.

And if we hold on to the Truth and remember God's faithfulness to us and, because of this, keep on going – through trials and without knowing how things will work out, but trusting God, then that is walking by faith

When going through tests,

Theological Truth

Previous confidence (don't chuck it away) → if our confidence is in the right place (God) then we won't be disappointed.

Endurance – keep going – leads to reward now (present tense) & fulfilment in the future

You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, **because you knew that** you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

So do not throw away your confidence; **it will be richly rewarded.**

If we persevere, then we do something that pleases God. The passage we are looking at today leads into chapter 11 – the great chapter on faith.

The route that chapter 10 lays out; knowing the Truth; remembering God's Character and dealings with you; and then persevering, rather than shrinking back; results in the faith that delights and pleases God.

I want to close today by giving two applications for this.

Application:

- People who feel distant from God (after the holidays feeling!)

Summer is a strange time for some people where we can get out of our stride in our walk with God. We can hit September feeling distant from God.

If that's the case, then the route back that this describes is to remind yourself about the Truth about Jesus – fix your eyes back on Him; then remind yourself of your history and then keep going.

- Healing

I got an e-mail last week about Todd Bentley who has led the healing/revival meetings in Lakeland, Florida,

I have talked a number of times over the last few months about healing and lessons I have learned about faith from watching him.

Sadly the e-mail said that he has stepped down from ministry and is working through problems in his marriage.

I know that this will have more of an effect on some people here than others, but a number of people have been encouraged to pray for healing because of his example.

I know that when things like this happen, it can knock people back.

I believe that this isn't a time for us to shrink back in praying for the sick, but a time to press on.

We need to make sure that our confidence is in the right place – in Jesus, who is unchanging, rather than in people who, sadly, sometimes fail.

And we need to remind ourselves of our history with God – what He has been doing amongst us.

And we need to persevere. Let's keep on going in praying for the sick; let's press on.

Because as we do – even through setbacks; we will be exercising God-pleasing faith.

I believe that this isn't a time to be shrinking back – it's a time to press on, because God is increasing His Presence and is about to bring in a harvest.

Time for preparation.

Why are you downcast, O my soul?

Why so disturbed within me?

**Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Saviour and my God.**

**My soul is downcast within me;
therefore I will remember you (Psalm 42:5-6)**