

Heb 5:11-6:20 // Keeping Going by Keeping Growing

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[0 : 00] Therefore, let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken toward maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death and of faith in God, instructions about cleansing rights, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

And God permitting, we will do so. It is impossible for those who have been once enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, and who have fallen away to be brought back to repentance.

To their loss, they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace. Land that drinks in the rain, often falling on it, and that produces a crop useful to those whom it is farmed, receives the blessing of God.

But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end, it will be burned. Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case, the things that have to do with salvation.

God is not unjust. He will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized.

[1 : 35] We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who, through faith and patience, inherit what has been promised. When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.

And so, after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. People swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we, who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us, may be greatly encouraged.

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner Jesus has entered on our behalf.

He has become a high priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. This is the word of the Lord. Thank you, Catherine, so much for reading.

[3 : 00] It seems to have a lot of Northern Irish accents this evening. I feel like I should almost apologise for not having an Irish accent. But we are restarting our series in Hebrews, which we left off actually back at the beginning of November.

And it's some passage. So let us pray and ask God for his help as we come to study his words. Let's pray. Living God, we thank you that you are a God who speaks.

And as we come to your word now, please, please soften our hearts. Sharpen our attention and give us ears to hear what you are saying to us.

Where we need warning, wake us up. Where we need encouragement, strengthen us. And by your spirit, help us not only to hear your word, but to trust and obey it.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, what kind of Christian do you want to be? What kind of Christian do you want to be?

[4 : 13] Do you want to be the kind who starts well or who finishes well? And closely connected to that, what kind of church do we want to be at St Silas?

As a church, we often talk about reach, grow, send. Reaching people with the good news about the Lord Jesus. Sending people out to serve Christ in the world.

But this evening, Hebrews presses us hard on the middle one. Grow. Because in the Christian life, growth is not optional.

It's not for the super keen. It's not a bonus feature. According to Hebrews, growth is how you keep going. And this passage is full of pictures of growth.

Moving from milk to solid food. Moving from foundations to maturity. You see rain falling on land that's meant to grow a crop.

[5 : 16] So the question Hebrews puts to us is simple but unsettling. Are we growing or are we stalling?

Now, for many Christians, if they know anything about Hebrews at all, it's the big warning in Hebrews chapter 6. And often not because they've studied the letter, but because it raises the question people worry about.

Can a Christian lose their salvation? And there's no doubt Hebrews contains some of the strongest warnings in the whole Bible.

So let me show you where they are. If we get the slide up hand. We've seen a couple already. So just flick back to chapter 2, verse 1. Chapter 2, verse 1.

Pay careful attention. Pay the most careful attention to how you listen. So you don't drift away. And then in chapter 3, verse 15.

[6 : 27] Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. These warnings are serious. They're meant to sober us.

But they're not meant to drive us into despair. They're one of God's ways of keeping his people going. And for the true believer, these warnings function like guardrails.

God uses them to keep us clinging to Christ. For those who are just going through the motions, the warnings expose the danger of being around church, being around church things, Christian things, without truly trusting Jesus.

And if you're here exploring Christianity, they make it clear that neutrality towards Jesus is not a safe place to remain forever.

So I think the big question Hebrews is asking is not, can someone lose their salvation? The big question for us is, will you keep listening?

[7 : 41] Or will you drift away? And Hebrews' answer is this. The way to keep going is to keep growing.

That's where we're heading tonight, under two main headings. So firstly, the big scary warning in verses 5, 11 to 6, 8. So last time we were in Hebrews, way back in November, we just got onto Jesus as our high priest.

In chapter 5, verse 10, a priest after the order of Melchizedek. And that may have left some of us wondering, Melchizedek who?

Well, don't worry. We'll get there next week. But before the writer can go any further, he hits the pause button. He could have skipped straight from chapter 5, verse 10, to chapter 7, verse 1.

But he refuses. Because before we talk Melchizedek, he has something urgent to say in verse 11. We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand.

[8 : 56] Or as some translations put it, because you have become dull or sluggish in hearing. The literal meaning? Lazy listeners.

It's the same word in chapter 6, verse 12. Lazy. It's not that they can't understand, but that they're no longer really trying.

They're hearing God's word, a little bit like you might hear a train announcement. The sound hits your ears, but nothing really registers. Spiritually, they've plateaued.

Well, maybe that's how you feel. Maybe you grew quickly when you first believed, but now a kind of spiritual slothfulness has overtaken your Christian life.

And so the writer issues a call to action. And the first one comes in chapter 5, 11 to 6, 3. So verse 12.

[9 : 57] By this time, you ought to be teachers. Speaking to the whole church. They're not teachers in the official sense, not necessarily like the John Payton Foundation for set-apart leaders and training or ministry trainees, but it's talking about every Christian growing to the point where you're able to explain your faith to others.

Opening the Bible with a friend. Teaching kids. Helping someone who's younger in the faith. Being ready to answer when someone asks you, why do you trust in Jesus?

But instead, something's gone wrong. They still need bottle feds. You've heard of Peter Pan syndrome. The refusal to grow up.

Well, Hebrews says, spiritual Peter Pan syndrome is real. They should be eating solid foods, but they're still on milk.

Baby formula. Picture yourself in your primary school classroom for a moment. Just imagine going back to your primary school classroom.

[11 : 09] Are you there as the teacher? Or are you there sitting on one of those little seats, learning your ABCs again? That's how jarring this is.

The writer wants to serve up a rich feast about Jesus and Melchizedek. And I was trying to think of what the culinary equivalent might have been.

I wonder if anybody's ever sampled osso bucco. I have once a rich Milanese meal of veal shank slow cooked on the bone.

A few drooling lips out there. One or two slightly shocked or horrified looks as well. It's not for the faint hearted. Chapter 7 of Hebrews is a feast like that.

It's hearty. It's rich. It will take a little bit more ruminating and digesting to savor the rich marrow of Melchizedek. It needs a bit more active chewing on the part of the listener.

[12 : 14] That's the kind of teaching they should be feasting on. Instead, end of verse 12, you need milk, not solid food. They should be weaned by now.

Instead, they're bottle fed. Now, at this point, we might misunderstand. When Hebrews talks about moving on to solid food, it does not mean leaving the gospel behind.

We never move on from the cross. We never graduate from grace. But we do grow deeper in understanding who Jesus is and what he's done.

The gospel isn't the shallow end of the pool. It's a limitless ocean. Maturity means going further in, diving deeper.

Before anyone thinks, well, you know what? I'm not that kind of person. I'm not academic. I've never seen myself studying theology. This isn't about intelligence. It's about hunger.

[13 : 16] How hungry are you for God's word? And actually, the way you grow, the way you grow when it comes to God's word is really striking.

It involves living out God's word practically. So verse 14 puts it like this. Do you see what that's saying?

Maturity doesn't come from reading hundreds of Christian books. Maturity doesn't come from filling your heads with information. It comes from putting into practice what you hear, from making everyday decisions shaped by Scripture, from obedience formed over time.

So yes, Sunday sermons matter. But what about Mondays? What about Tuesdays? What about the rest of the week? Are we actually trying to live in light of what God's saying to us through his word? Are we letting it shape our attitudes, our habits, our choices? Are we responding to God's word with our hearts and our minds? Are we letting God speak to us, speak into our lives?

[14 : 39] That's how maturity grows. Regularly feeding on Bible truth, solid Bible truth, shapes you and equips you to live godly lives.

Don't be lazy listeners. That's what this is saying. So the call comes in chapter 6, verse 1.

Therefore, let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity.

Now again, don't hear that wrong. That doesn't mean leaving Jesus behind. It means leaving kindergarten. The foundational truths listed in verses 1 to 2.

Repentance, faith, instruction about cleansing, laying on of hands, resurrection, eternal judgment. You could think of that as a kind of Christianity 101. A kind of Christianity explored introduction about the basics of becoming a Christian.

Important, yes. Extremely important. But not the end of your growth. It's not move beyond Christ.

[15 : 49] It's move beyond elementary teachings about Christ. The point is, you can't stay in the life course forever and expect to grow to maturity.

I should say the life course is absolutely brilliant if you're exploring the Christian faith and setting out on your journey like that. But you can't stay there forever.

Now let's pause and reflect. Do you want to grow as a Christian? Is that the kind of Christian you want to be? Well, are you nourished by God's Word day by day?

Or if you feel your heart's grown kind of unresponsive and numb to God's Word, well, maybe it's time to start feeding yourself properly.

Every day we should start with the most important meal of the day. Breakfasting on God's Word. The basics are essential.

[16 : 56] But they're not the end. So don't settle for a permanently babyish Christianity. Not because you can't grow, but because you won't.

And a rested spiritual development isn't just sad. It's dangerous. And as the next verses are about to show us, the stakes could not be higher.

So what follows is one of the most sobering passages in all Scripture. Verse 4. It is impossible for those who have been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the coming age, and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance.

It's heavy, isn't it?

The first question everyone asks is the obvious one. Who is this talking about? Is Hebrews saying that a genuine believer, a born-again Christian united to Christ, can fall away and be lost forever?

[18 : 23] But if that's what it means, how do we square that with the other promises in Scripture? Romans 8 says, nothing, nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Jesus says in John chapter 6 that he will lose none of those the Father has given him. Hebrews itself says that. So you just flick back to chapter 3, verse 14.

We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end. Everyone who truly trusts in Christ will make it to the end.

I've listed some more verses in the service sheet. You can look them up at home. But here's where the warning bites. Before we rush to say, right, okay, so we can relax, the scary thing is this. Hebrews is telling us people can be outwardly involved, deeply involved in the Christian life and still fall away.

[19 : 41] Verse 4 lists their experience. Enlightened. Tasted the heavenly gift. Shared in the Holy Spirit. Tasted the goodness of God's Word and the powers of the coming age.

Sounds like a Christian, doesn't it? That's what makes this passage so unsettling. They've heard the truth. Felt conviction. Experienced the joy of Christian community.

These are people who've had real exposure to the gospel. And to everyone around them, they look like genuine believers.

And yet, they decisively, publicly turn away from Jesus. This isn't talking about struggles with sin. It's not talking about doubt. It's not about a hard season. This is something way deeper. It's falling away. A settled, deliberate rejection of Jesus.

[20 : 48] A hardening of the heart. And Hebrews says, For that kind of rejection, there is no way back.

That's shocking. Not just that some people drift away from church, but that some people who drift away from Christ do so in such a way that hardens them beyond repentance.

So it is a category of abandoning Jesus that you can never return from. Hebrews gives us a picture to help us understand in verses 7 to 8.

Two pieces of land receive the same rain. One produces a crop. It receives God's blessing. The other produces thorns and faces judgment.

Well, if that sounds familiar, Jesus told a very similar story in the parable of the sower. Every time God's word is preached, different things happen.

[21 : 58] Some hear it and it bounces off. Others receive it with excitement, but it doesn't last. But then there are two groups who, for a long time, look exactly the same.

The seed goes in. The roots go down. When the shoots come up, everything looks promising. The difference only appears later. One keeps on bearing fruit.

The other is slowly choked by competing loves. Fruit doesn't save you. Christ saves you. But spiritual fruit is evidence that salvation is real.

And so a lack of fruitfulness is a warning. Hebrews is telling us that the word of God can be received in ways that look real for a time, but never mature into persevering faith.

Imagine two people, Joe and Jim, we'll call them. For years, they look identical. Both hear the word gladly. Both participate in church.

[23 : 10] Both are well-liked in their small group. But over time, the differences begin to show. Joe keeps close to Jesus.

He struggles. He doubts. He stumbles. Some mornings, he has to drag himself out of bed to pray and read his Bible. Some nights, he wrestles with temptation.

Some days, he weeps over his failures. But he keeps coming back to Jesus. Jim, on the other hand, drifts.

For a while, he sticks about. He still smiles in church, but his eyes are elsewhere. He allows other things to grow alongside his faith.

Gradually, he loses his appetite for God's word. He skips reading his Bible, telling himself he'll catch up later. He stops hanging around other Christians. He stops talking about Jesus to his friends.

[24 : 09] Eventually, he stops showing up altogether. He decides it's not for him after all. At the start, Joe and Jim look the same.

But by the end, they could not be more different. It's worth saying here that Hebrews 6 is not talking about backsliding.

It's apostasy. In the New Testament, they are different categories. If you think of the apostle Peter, he denied Jesus for a season.

You could say he rebelled against Jesus. He went and did his own thing. But then he returned.

That's backsliding. Judas, well, he's another category altogether.

He walked away and never returned. That's apostasy. Someone who's been around church, perhaps, who walks away from Jesus and never comes back.

[25 : 12] At one point, both Peter and Judas looked like they'd blown it. The difference showed up later. Well, that's a sobering warning.

I guess at this moment, this is a moment when faces come to mind. Friends, family members, people we once used to sit next to in church.

And we wonder, are they a Peter who will one day come back? Or are they a Judas who never will? Well, if your mind goes there, let me gently say this.

Hebrews doesn't want us speculating about them. It wants us to look at ourselves. Because this warning has a purpose.

Not to paralyze us with fear. But to wake us up. Warnings are one way that God uses to keep his people going.

[26 : 23] Like a loving parent shouting to a child, Stop! Don't run into the roads! It's not to make the child anxious. It's to keep the child alive.

That's why this passage feels urgent. There's no safe way to postpone coming back to Jesus. No safe way to drift.

The only safe place is holding on to him. You see, Hebrews isn't asking for your spiritual birth certificate.

It asks a simpler question. Are you trusting? Are you holding on to Jesus right now? Still listening to him.

Still coming back to him. Still wanting him. Even through doubt. Even through weakness. Even through ongoing battles with sin. Jim Packer once put it like this.

[27 : 28] The proof of past conversion is present convertedness. The only proof of past conversion is present convertedness.

Not I had an experience once. But right now. Right here. I am trusting in Jesus. So to the question, can you fall away?

Hebrews' answer is simple. Don't. Don't fall away from Jesus. Because here is the great tension of the Christian life.

God keeps his people. And the people he keeps keep going by keeping growing. Okay. So before we move on.

Let's just pause and breathe for a moment. We've just seen the sobering warning. The real danger of falling away from Jesus.

[28 : 27] And now Hebrews turns from warning to hope. Because God never leaves his people stranded in fear. Each summer in Latvia we walk through Jermula Park.

On the way to the beach. And scattered across the path are these enormous anchors. Some of them are so big that the kids climb and clamber all over them.

Dwarfed in comparison. I think the largest one weighs in at about 23 tons. You can't miss their weight. Their stability. Their sheer immovable stability like that.

They're solid. That's exactly the image Hebrews gives us in verse 19 of chapter 6. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul.

Firm and secure. After the warning we've just heard. I love how pastoral the writer is. I suspect that some of us here are feeling sobered.

[29 : 32] Shaken even perhaps. Especially if you have a tender conscience. So let me speak to two groups in the room. First, if you're sitting there thinking, What if this is me?

What if I've denied Jesus? You might be a Christian who's fallen into sin in a big way. You might be thinking, I want to repent. But what if there's no way back?

What if I've gone too far this time? If you want forgiveness. If you want to come back into a healthy relationship with Jesus.

Then this warning is not, not describing you. Look again at verse 6. What does it say is impossible? It is impossible for them to be brought back to repentance. In other words, verse 6 describes people who don't want to repent.

[30 : 40] So if you do want to repent. If your heart is grieved over sin. If you long to come back to Jesus. And by definition, this is not you. Your desire to return is itself evidence of God's grace.

Let me say this personally. I grew up in a Christian home. But as a young adult, I walked away from Jesus for many years.

For over a decade. Well over a decade. And to anyone looking in, I would have seemed a lost cause. But in God's mercy, he brought me back.

So if your heart wants to return to Christ. However far you feel you've drifted. You haven't gone too far.

And actually, the more dangerous posture is the opposite. The person who sits here and thinks, you know what?

[31 : 42] I'm fine. This could never be me. I've been around church for as long as I can remember. I've served for years. Sure, I might zone out a little bit during the sermon. Sure, I don't really engage all that much in the small group Bible studies.

After all, I don't really need to grow anymore. I'm already pretty mature in my faith. Thank you very much. Thankfully, I've never heard anybody articulate that at St. Silas.

But that's exactly who Hebrews is concerned about. Not those who are fighting sin and wrestling with doubt. But those who are complacent.

Those who've stopped listening. Those who are in danger, perhaps, of falling away from Jesus altogether. Yet, despite the seriousness of the warning, there's encouragement about their hunger for God's Word.

And I think encouragement for us too about St. Silas. For our hunger for God's Word. Verse 9. We are convinced of better things in your case.

[32 : 53] The things that have to do with salvation. Why? Because there is evidence of grace. Verse 10. God's not unjust.

He'll not forget your work and the love you've shown Him as you've helped His people. Love for God vertically. Love for God's people horizontally. Here's the crucial point.

That's not where our assurance finally rests. Our assurance doesn't rest on our love or service or our track record. It rests on God's character and God's promises.

And in verses 13 to 20, the writer says, Those promises come with a triple lock guarantee. In verse 13, when God made His promise to Abraham, He didn't just give His word about blessing and multiplying.

He made an oath. And because there's no one greater He could swear by, He swore by Himself. Two unchangeable things. God's promise and God's oath.

[33 : 55] And since God cannot lie, His word is absolutely secure. Now here's the point. If Abraham could trust God's promise and His oath, how much more can we?

Because Abraham had a promise and an oath, but we have a promise and an oath and a forerunner. Jesus has already gone ahead of us into the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, into heaven itself on our behalf.

Our future rest isn't just promised. It's occupied by Jesus. That's why verse 19 says, We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

Now in the ancient world, when ships were struggling against the wind or in stormy waters, they couldn't always make it safely into harbour on their own.

They didn't have rudders. They didn't have side thrusters like they do today. So one sailor, the forerunner, would take a small boat and row ahead into the harbour and fix the anchor securely inside.

[35 : 06] The rest of the crew simply had to just hold on, to hold the line. And slowly, surely through perseverance, the ship would be safely drawn home.

And that's exactly what Hebrews says Jesus has done. Just read with me again verses 19 to 20.

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain where our forerunner Jesus has entered on our behalf. Our anchor is in heaven.

Jesus has gone ahead. He has secured our future and our hope is fastened to him. Not our strength. Not our performance.

Not the strength of our grip. Not even the strength of our faith. Our hope is anchored in Christ's finished work. So what kind of Christian do you want to be?

[36 : 16] Not the one who drifts. Not the one who coasts. Not the one who lets go. But the one who keeps going. The one who keeps growing.

Keeps listening. Keeps responding. And above all, keeps holding on to Jesus. Because the anchor holds. Jesus is already there.

And as you hold fast to him, he will hold fast to you. And he will bring you safely home. Amen. And let's pray.

Father, this is a weighty passage dealing with eternal consequences. So please help us to take your word seriously. By your spirit, help us, each of us here, and us together as a church family, to be eager to grow, to be eager to keep listening, eager to keep going with Christ.

Help us to trust your promises. Give us a secure hope, full assurance of hope, anchored in the Lord Jesus. And keep our hearts soft.

[37 : 33] And keep our hearts soft. Guard us from drifting. Help us to respond to your word with humble, willing obedience. And Father, for any here tonight who are not yet trusting in Christ, please open their hearts to him.

Help them even now to turn to him, to trust him, and to find life and forgiveness in his name. Father, we also bring before you those we love, those who have wandered, who seem far away from you.

In your mercy, please bring your prodigals home. Soften their hearts. Draw them back to your son.

And help us, Lord, as a church family, to spur one another on in faith and love as we hold fast to our hope, firm and secure in Christ.

In his name we pray. Amen.