

Pressing On

by John McGregor

The sermon encourages believers to remember God's faithfulness and to persevere in their faith amidst challenges.

Duration: 41:50

Scripture: Hebrews 10:32

Topics: "Pressing On"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of maintaining a passionate and living relationship with God. He encourages believers to stand together, stay confident, and seek to fulfill the will of God. The preacher reminds the Hebrew church to remember the faithfulness of God and to retain their confidence in Him, despite the negativity and criticism they may face. He uses the example of a captain navigating through fog by focusing on three lights on a mountain to illustrate the importance of relying on the word of God as a guiding light in our lives.

Transcript

Missed you guys last week. I was in northeastern Maine and had three little churches together right in the country for three days of prayer encounter, and it was a very good and special time. Interesting to hear some of the testimonies that came out of it and some of the pastors saying, my people know that I'm a preacher, but I want them to know that I also am a man who spends time in prayer.

So that was encouraging to hear. And we had a young man who's a soldier give us a testimony on Tuesday night of how he had said to the Lord on Monday night, Lorne, if there's somebody you want me to pray for, wake me up in the middle of the night, Monday night. So at 4.30 the Lord woke him up and laid his sergeant on his heart and he said, you know, Lorne, I'm not experienced at this prayer thing, so if this is really you, Lorne, would you give me a chance to talk to my sergeant about you? And on Tuesday afternoon after their shift, the sergeant said to him, have you got a minute? And the minute got to be an hour and a half where they talked about Jesus, and the sergeant said to his young soldier, in times of combat, I see no fear in you.

Are you not scared to die? He said, no, I'm not, because I know the Lord Jesus is my Savior. The sergeant said, well, I've been in combat a lot more than you, but I've never gone there without fear that I might die, and I want you to tell me about this one, this Jesus. So now, if the Lord wakes you up at 4.30 in the morning and lays Sergeant Aaron, I don't remember his last name, on your heart, just pray for him and

pray for Mike as he talks to him about Jesus day by day.

Thanks for praying for me while I was away those days, and they were special times. We want to take our text this morning from Hebrews chapter 10, and I'll read verse 32 through chapter 11, verse 1, and then we're going to do something quite different. Instead of me praying, you're going to pray, okay? So that's the two-minute warning.

We'll read the verses. Hebrews chapter 10, beginning at verse 32, says, 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, and 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 a better and lasting possession. 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. We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

My faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. And this is what the ancients were commended for. And let's just pause right there at the end of verse one, and just for something different, why not turn to somebody, two or three? It's a nice thing about chairs.

You don't have to be stuck in a wooden line. You can move around a little bit for the next couple of minutes, and here's what I'd like you to do. I'd like you just to sit with somebody, two or three people, sometimes four.

If it gets to be six, not everybody will be able to do it, and just pray. Here we are. We came to worship the Lord.

We came to meet with him. We came to talk with him. If you're uncomfortable praying out loud, don't worry about it.

Don't say anything. Just join in with those who will seek the Lord for a couple of moments, and that'll be fine. Not trying to put anybody on the spot, but just to take some moments where we as a congregation meet the Lord in prayer.

And in a couple of moments, I'll draw that time to a close, and we'll look in the Word together. So remember, Scripture says, lay hands suddenly on no man, so don't grab them real suddenly, but just kind of get with someone you can pray with, and pray for one another, and pray the Lord would speak to our hearts in these moments. And I'll wait for the gentle hum of prayer to die down a bit, and then I'll close this up.

Father, we thank you for the gift of prayer. Thank you that alone many voices are raised to you in these moments. You hear each and every one of them.

And Lord, that's amazing to us as we live in this flesh and in this body. You are so far above us, so much stronger than we are, so amazing in grace and love. As we've come to worship you this morning, we worship you even at the place of prayer, just to pour out our hearts.

And Lord, we've come from a week of busyness. Many things have happened in each of our lives this past week, and Lord, we need a word from you to strengthen us and to equip us, to encourage us as your people, and to lead us, Father, by your free spirit. And so in these moments, we are asking, indeed, as each one has already requested, Lord, speak to us.

Lord, speak to me. And Lord, it is wonderful to be together, of that there is no doubt. And it's great to be part of a church family where there is love and unity and all of those things.

Yet, Father, we need so much your presence and your touch in these moments. And as we come to open your word, Lord, there is no human being who is sufficient to do that. It is inexhaustible.

It is majestic. It is life-changing. It is powerful.

Father, as we then look at your word today, may you so encourage us that as we would step from this place, we would know we have not just met with one another, but we've also met with you and known the touch of your hand and the touch of your heart into our lives and relationships and homes and families. We ask, Father, that by your spirit, you would come and breathe upon each one of us. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. Did it feel good to pray together? I think it's always good to pray together. Let me say a word as we go to look into these Scriptures.

About next weekend, as you know, the Evangelical Free Church has approached us about the possibility of getting together the two congregations in the longer term, and we don't know whether that will happen or not. And we have simply said we would join and visit and get to know each other and seek the face of God. And so, as you think about next weekend and think about our own Glencairn family, try to be sure that everybody knows we're at 10 o'clock over there.

And you guys on Saturday morning will enjoy some good food, but also want to say a word about Francois Carr. He's South African, obviously, but he's a man that God has used in many places around the world. He's not what I would call a sort of, whoo-hoo kind of guy, but he's very solid in what he has to say about the work of God and how God works in our hearts, and very Scriptural, and I think you'll enjoy him thoroughly.

Hebrews 10, 32 through 11. This is the third message that I've prepared this week to preach this morning, but don't worry, I'm not going to preach all three of them. And first I thought, well, Lord, you know, there's so many texts that say one another, you know, love one another, forgive one another, and I thought we could look at that and it would really join us at the heart and so on.

And then I thought, well, you know, in Romans chapter one, there's a whole bunch of things that Paul says about the people of God and the things that they do together, and I thought that's a great text. And on along toward Friday afternoon, I had this great uncomfortableness in my heart that says, no. And the Lord laid on my heart, really, this little statement, don't put away your confidence, don't give up your confidence that you find here in Hebrews chapter 10.

But let's just consider it for a few moments together. Hebrews was written to a church in tough times. Do you live in tough times? Yeah, I think so, we would say that.

And it was written in times where there were many scoffers. A lot of people were saying things like, well, you know, Jesus is supposed to come back. Where's coming? What's going on? You Christians say this, but look at what's happening in the world.

And, you know, you sort of have an optimistic view, but where's all the good stuff that you talk about in this world with all the evil and all the things that go on? Does that sort of connect with your heart, maybe, about the world that we live in as well? All kinds of scoffers and negativity. And we live in a time where there's all kinds of things like that concerning the church and so on, and all kinds of critics. There's never a shortage of negativity.

And one of the reasons that I love the book of Hebrews is there's so much in it about keeping confidence with God. And in these few verses, you know, the apostle, the writer of Hebrews gives three pieces of advice to the Hebrew church. And I thought we'd just spend a few moments on them this morning, and may the Lord just encourage your heart as he has mine in this little text.

As you see in verse 32, he says, remember those earlier days when you received the light. And the first thing I believe that God is saying to his church here is remember God is faithful. And he is faithful in all things, dear ones.

And here the writing of scripture points them to look back and remember when first they were enlightened, when first they came to know the Lord Jesus, when first that became true and salvation became real. And as you stop for a moment this morning and think back, can you just cast your mind back to that time when first you discovered the reality of Jesus? Not because your parents said so, not because your church said so, not because there was something going on, but because you really knew that Jesus had made himself known and had come to live in your heart and in your life. It wasn't then just a transference of knowledge, but it was that moment when you knew the enlightening of God and you knew that things would never ever be the same again.

And at the beginning of this text, that is where it opens up in verses 32 through 34, there is this enlightenment that we are to look back to and think about the faithfulness of God. And he's really saying when you look at that, you remember there were persecutions. Do you remember when first you came to Christ, some of those that you thought would understand, some of those that you thought would just fall down and say, wow, I can't wait to become a Christian.

Instead, they mocked you and ridiculed you, and you had some pressure and some persecution and all of those kind of things going on. Do you remember that? And yet, you know, God was faithful and in times of distress because the text talks about how they had lost their possessions and they had been standing side by side with those who had lost their possessions and property and so on. And in that, all through that, God is there causing them to stand together.

You know, that's one of the things that I noticed in reading through this text. Tough times cause the family to draw together, don't they? Tough times are the things that make us sort of close the ranks and stand side by side in things and to be able to come alongside someone and say, I'm with you. Now, Roberta and I have kind of a third son that you haven't heard about.

His name is Graham Tucker. He's not actually our biological son, but we call him our third son because he's been such a close friend to our children and family, and on Friday night through the night, Graham's dad, who's about 50 years old, had a massive heart attack and died. You know, when I heard that news, that's a tough time scenario, isn't it? And as I called and said to him, I just, I'm shocked about your dad.

I want to talk to you. And last night when we connected on the phone, there was that sense of just coming side by side to say, you know, Graham, I can't change this, but I want you to know I love you and I'm with you, and if there's something I can do to help you, I want to be there. And that's the kind of picture that is drawn for us here in verses 32 through 34.

He's saying, you stood with those in distress, those in trouble, those in tougher times. You see, God never stopped loving them and caring for them and providing for them, but those tough times caused them to close ranks and to stand together in it. And that's where I think there is such value in the church family, in knowing that there's a connectedness in the heart of God's people that we can stand together in it.

Now, God is faithful in all things. He is faithful in his word and to his word. I love Isaiah 40 and verse 8. It says this, and the word of God stands forever.

And in the Hebrew context, it literally says, and the word of our God rises above everything else to stand forever. And sometimes people get mad at me because I won't make a decision without really hearing from God, because every time I have made a decision without really hearing from God, I have lived to regret it. And if his word rises to stand above all things, that's what I want to stand on, not on my intellect, not on my feelings, but on his word.

And there are times, too, when I talk to people and they'll say things like, well, maybe God doesn't want me to be in this relationship. Ever heard that? And I'll say, he will never contradict his word. Never.

You see, when you think about how he is faithful to his word, just think for a moment about Abraham. Remember, God says to Abraham when he's old, 100 years old, even older than me. I know, Brad.

I know. I haven't hit the big 100 yet. It's coming.

Yeah. God says to him when he's 90 years old, you're going to have a son. And in him, the nations of the earth are going to be blessed.

And I can hear Abraham in an Irish moment saying, whoa! But then the same God says to him, take your son, your only son, your son whom you love, and take him to Mount Moriah and sacrifice him there. But he's faithful to his word. And as Abraham obeys the Lord, you know the incident, as the knife is being raised, there is the noise of a ram caught in a thicket back there.

Because, you see, he is always faithful to his word. And dear friends, this morning I want to just encourage you, what are you hearing from his word? You'll always hear more than enough to shut you down from all kinds of sources. And you'll wonder sometimes, how could there be so much negativity? But when you come back to his word, you're on that strong rock that is the Lord Jesus.

He's faithful to his way. When we're on his way, we need not fear, we need not worry. He's faithful to his will to do it.

I like trying to focus in on the Lord and following the Lord, because I know that in his will is that which is perfect for me. And I know that outside of his will, I'm going to struggle and struggle and struggle, and I'm going to feel like I hit a wall every single time. So you say, John, how do you know his will? Well, there's all kinds of devices that people give as advice and so on, but I would say this, when you're in the will of God, you know it.

There's a holy boldness that's there, there's a strength that's there, there's a togetherness that's there, and yet so often we motor on without that. I think it was F.B. Meyer who said, it struck him going across the Irish Sea on the ferry one night that as he was coming into Anglesey, Holyhead in Wales, there were three lights on the mountain, and he noticed them above the fog, and he wondered, how does the captain take this ship into the harbor right to the pier in the fog? So he went and asked the captain, and the captain said to him, it's actually pretty easy. You know, it sounds like I'm some kind of magic worker, but actually you see those three lights on the mountain that are above the fog? Well, I just focus on them, and as I position the ship, when I can see only one light, then I go at this speed for this many minutes, and I shut her down, and she glides right into the pier.

And Meyer said, oh, you've given me such a sermon. When the Word of God, the first light, and the feeling of my heart with the Spirit of God speaking to me, the second light, and the circumstances around me all line up, I'm in the will of God, and I can go. And he is faithful always to his covenant people.

You see, in our text he's speaking about fulfilling the will of God. Let me quickly move us along and say that all of Hebrews 11 is a celebration of God's faithfulness. We sometimes think about it as the catalog of heroes of the faith, but God gave them the faith, and they are simply expressing his faithfulness in their day and generation as they follow him with an obedient heart.

The second thing that I believe is given to God's people in advice in these short verses is retain your confidence. In verses 35 and 36, don't throw away your confidence. And what I believe happens to us oh so often, I know it does me, is little questions creep in, and things start to itch, and all the what-if questions float in there.

Don't throw away your confidence. The Word of God says there are often attacks and struggles, and who knows how will we ever get past that, through that, around that, over that, under that, somehow past that. I like what one dear old black saint said in the church in Alabama when somebody said to her, you're always praising the Lord.

How do you get to that situation with all the stuff that happens to you? And she quoted scripture. She said, well honey, it's because the Bible says it came to pass. It didn't come to stay.

There are so many kinds of things like this, aren't there? All the questions that come flying at us when you step by faith and seek to follow the Lord, but what if? Yeah, but that could, I mean that might, and on and on it goes. We've got two Irish friends, Sam and Laura Donaldson. Sammy went to the Irish Baptist College, and while he was training for the ministry, and Laura had a job, you know, and it was kind of tough times financially.

But week by week, the Lord seemed to supply exactly what was needed, and they paid their rent every week, because that's what happens over there. And every week, somehow, out of wages that were left over, or people who gave gifts at church, or that little handshake with some money in it, or whatever it was, there was always 10 pounds to give to the rent man on Monday morning. And when it came to one week,

there was only seven pounds and 50 pence, and Sammy's at school, so Laura has to face the music.

Don't you love it, ladies, when we abandon you to face the music? Not that guys would ever do anything like that, right? So she waited, and the rent man came. Seven pounds fifty. Opened the door, didn't say anything, just handed him the seven pounds fifty.

Counted it, put it in his pocket, marked off his book, said, thanks. She said, wait a minute, I only give you seven pounds fifty. He said, I know.

Didn't you get the memo? You got a reduction this week. Everybody's down to seven fifty. That's God.

But you see, we lose our confidence so easily, don't we? And the task looks so big, and it looks so hard, and how will we ever get there? Don't lose your confidence. Patient endurance is what scripture tells us that we should do. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Patient endurance in following and doing his will leads to the promise of God. I love this little verse. You see, it's not telling me that I'm just going to slog along at this forever.

It's telling me that if I patiently endure and press on with God and do his will, it is going to lead to the promise of God. You know, I like a little song. Maybe you've sung it, and this is why I'm not on any of the worship teams, okay? But I love what it says.

God will make a way where there seems to be no way. Are you facing a situation where there seems to be no way? All the musicians are having a little chuckle. That's good.

Don't lose your confidence. Don't lose it concerning salvation. Don't lose it concerning the work of God in your heart and life.

He can finish what he started. Don't lose it in your marriage, your family, your home. Persevere.

Third thing, because I've got to finish in six minutes or less. As we look at our text, verse 37 through chapter 11, verse 1, I believe the scripture is saying, Respond in faith. Respond in faith.

You see here in verse 38, but my righteous one will live by faith, and if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him. I looked up, and I'm by no means a Greek scholar, but I looked up that shrinking back business. You know what it refers to is when a sailor cuts the sail, when he pulls down the sail and just starts to coast.

That's what it's talking about. When there are times of just saying, This is getting out of hand. It's going too fast for me.

Pull down the sail and just coast. And I think so often, many, many believers do this. Just coast.

And some people say, John, you can't go by blind faith. Listen to me. Faith is never blind.

Faith is the gift of God to you and me, and it is never blind. When the children of Israel could have gone into the promised land, you remember? Ten of those who were spies said, Not going there. What were they doing? All down that sail, man.

This is going into conflict. I'm not going there. But there were two voices, Joshua and Caleb.

Were they taking a leap of blind faith? No, because they'd already been there. They'd already seen it. And you know, as you follow the Lord, you begin to see the potential that is in Him.

Not in us, but in Him. When you begin to think about the potential of what God can do, does it not stir our hearts to say to all of those things that are so negative and all of those wounds that rise up and say, You can't follow God that way. Man, you're a wounded soldier, or this is going on in your life, or that is happening to you.

But instead, we can put our eyes and our anchor in Jesus. And sometimes I just say to the devil, Thanks for the reminder of how weak I am. That means I better go and talk to Jesus about it some more.

And you know the old saying that the devil trembles when he sees the weakest saint on his knees. You see, as you look at these last couple of verses in chapter 10, let's just note something. There are two options always that face Christians.

We can live by faith, and that's not easy. There are many, many times where it would be so much easier not to seek for faith, to believe something good in a situation, but to just walk away from it. There's a great big Filipino man.

He's big for a fellow from the Philippines. His name is Jing Dubrico. He came and preached at a missions conference for us in Arendelle Alliance Church some years ago, and I remember Jing getting up and saying to the congregation, I want to speak to you about big things.

He's a big man. And I thought, Man, where's he going with this? And he said, Let me define big. Believe in God.

And he started to talk about how he was a district superintendent of an area in the Philippines with over 400 churches in it. Why did it get there? It got there because they believed in a big God, not in their ability, but in his. And so as you think about it, I also remind you of the words of Hudson Taylor.

He simply said this. He said, Believe God for big things. Attempt big things for God, and expect big things from God.

The other option is to shrink back, and the word says God has no pleasure in the one who shrinks back. Over the years that I've had the privilege to preach, about 40 years now, I'm so often called out to God, Lord, please don't take away the passion, because I know if I lose the passion, I'll just shrink back. I know I can fall away.

I know I can get back to the things that I used to foolishly do. I ask you this morning, as the word of God speaks to our hearts, where are you sitting? Is that living relationship causing you to say, Lorne, whatever it takes, whatever the challenge, let me go with you? Or is there that sense in your heart of saying, Lorne, let's haul in the sail a bit, slow down, let's coast. So if we summarize these three thoughts, he's saying stand together, stay confident, and seek to fulfill the will of God.

And it is 1245, and John needs to stop. Let's pray. Lord, as we have sought your face and as we've opened your word, we see that faith is trusting for what we can't see and believing for what we can't do.

Lord, our heart's desire as the people of God is to walk in obedience to you and to your will. And so, Father, we would just ask, speak continuously to our hearts as we come together to consider your way for

us as a church family. Give us the leadership of your spirit, but let us not haul thine sail, but let us trust you by faith for whatever it is that you desire.

And just quietly in your heart this morning as we close out this time, if God's been speaking to you about coasting, just pulling down the sail and easing up, take a couple of quiet moments and draw near to the Lord. And as you do, he will draw near to you. He's so faithful.

And don't lose your confidence. Keep it firmly placed in him. Lord, we thank you so much for your word, for this time of worship, and for your people.

In Jesus' name, amen.

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