



Session 13
Summer 2020
Multiage

Cloud of witnesses

HEBREWS 11:1–12:2

prepare



PRAYER

God, generation upon generation have been witnesses of your glory. I follow Jesus and sing your praises for the generations to come! Amen.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

To be encouraged by the lives of faithful people

STORY SUMMARY

The writer of Hebrews describes faith as the assurance of things hoped for but not seen. Faith has led many to obey and serve God: Abel, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Esau, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, David, and others. These people lived as strangers seeking a heavenly country. Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, we too should persevere, remaining focused on Jesus, who goes before us.

teaching tips for multiage

The cloud of witnesses is like a cheering crowd lining the edges of a racing route. They know our struggles; they are our history. Children are interested in knowing where they come from. Just as they like to hear family anecdotes, they will be curious to hear stories of the faithful. As you learn about those from the past, guide the children to see how they continue the story of faith.

As this is the last session in the quarter, send the children's prayer journals (Bonus Multiage Leaflets) home with them and encourage them to keep writing at home.

Decide which Explore options to offer. Check Supplies and To do throughout this session to see what needs to be prepared.

Background to the epistle

Most epistles are directed to a specific congregation or individual. Not this one. Certain clues (“those from Italy” in Hebrews 13:24) suggest an Italian or even Roman location, but even that is not certain. It appears to be written to Jews who have already been part of the Jesus movement for a considerable period, people who are familiar both with Jewish scripture and Christian interpretation. The group is experiencing or has experienced persecution because of their faith, and some may be losing heart because the hoped-for return of Christ has not yet occurred.

This thought suggests Hebrews was written late in the first century, although it is already quoted by one of the Apostolic Fathers in about the year 95 CE. If this date is accurate, it is puzzling that no mention is made of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 CE.

A number of writers for Hebrews have been suggested, including Paul, although the literary and theological distance from his other writing is immense. Apollos [Uh-POL-uhs], Barnabas [BAHR-nuh-buhs], and Priscilla [Pri-SIL-uh] have also been named as possible authors. The one thing we can say for certain is that the writer was an eloquent, educated Hellenistic Jew.

A sermon urging perseverance

Some have argued that Hebrews is closer to a sermon than a letter. It lacks some structural elements, such as a salutation and a closing, found in other epistles. The argument begins immediately in chapter 1 with the affirmation that God has spoken to “our ancestors” in various ways through the years, but this relationship culminated in sending the Son.

At various points through the book, Jesus is compared and contrasted to other figures in Jewish history—such as Moses, Abraham, and Melchizedek. The Son is revealed as the ideal priest. Scattered throughout even the early chapters of Hebrews are warnings about unbelief and falling away from faith. This message is a call to persevere even in the face of adversity. The closing chapters focus on a closer examination of the nature of faith.

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Clouds of witnesses

This week’s passage surveys heroes of faith within Jewish history from Abel to Jesus. The point of this recital is to encourage fidelity and endurance—faithful living—in the manner of those who have walked with God in ages past. Note that this essentially develops the opening two verses of the epistle. *Faith* is defined as assurance and conviction of things hoped for and things unseen, even if we cannot see and touch them. Our faith joins us with a great cloud of witnesses who have walked in faith with God before us and thus show us how we might live faithfully.

The first cluster of faith heroes is from the patriarchal era: Abel, Enoch [EE-nuhk], and Noah. Enoch may not be particularly familiar to us, but much had been written about him during the intertestamental period (the time between the compiling of the last book of the Old Testament and the first book of the New Testament).

Abraham receives more attention than any other figure in this survey. This emphasis is explained by the importance of the Abrahamic covenant within Israel’s history, which cemented the place of the Israelites as God’s chosen people and promised them their own land. After briefly noting the role of Isaac, Jacob, Esau, and Joseph, the remainder of the chapter is devoted to a consideration of Moses’ faith and a more cursory perusal of many others, including several women.

Jesus, the perfecter of our faith

The emphasis throughout is on endurance and obedience, even in the face of frightful suffering. The opening verses of chapter 12 bring the recital to its climax: Although all the prior examples should be commended for their faith, none were perfect. That honor is reserved for Jesus, “the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (verse 2).

Jesus endured more than any of the others in the “cloud of witnesses.” Mindful of his victory, we can carry on through whatever we face in faithful endurance. This is the point of the rest of the epistle.

gather

supplies

- Prayer journals (Bonus Multiage Leaflets)
- *Shine Songbook and CD* (or digital versions)
- *Annual Shine Songbooks*
- CD player
- Large bowl of water
- Towel
- Pencils or crayons

resource pack

- “Together we can” game tiles
- Bible memory poster (Ephesians 3)

media connections

- *Famous People of the Bible* by Joy Melissa Jensen
- “Hebrews 11 & 12: The great faith of God’s people” by Rene Pfitzner (YouTube)
- Internet search for “People in the Bible”
- *All Saints* painting by Fra Angelico (Internet)

BUILD COMMUNITY

Working toward a common goal builds community. Give each child some of the tiles from the “Together we can” game. Do not use the side with numbers and letters; use the tiles like a puzzle. Ask the children to work together to complete the image.

WORSHIP TOGETHER

Light a candle and invite the children into a time of silence. Let the silence settle for about a minute, then pray about how Jesus is our guide. Sing together “God’s Here Now” from the *Shine Songbook and CD* (track 4, page 6). Raise your hands prayerfully as you sing “God’s here” or “God is here.” Open your arms wide as you sing “God’s there” or “God is there.”

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Praying for forgiveness or healing helps to rid us of things that hinder our race of faith. Display a large bowl of water and ask the children to wash their hands one at a time. As they wash their hands, invite them to silently pray a prayer asking for forgiveness or help. Let the water serve as a cleansing. Have a towel ready to dry hands. As children wait, ask them to write or doodle in the clouds on page 4 of their prayer journal (Bonus Multiage Leaflet) about something that needs Jesus’ guidance.

For larger groups: Provide more than one bowl and towel.

Bible memory

Assign each child a part of the memory passage. Challenge them to recite their parts from memory. Read through the passage, each child contributing her or his part. Then recite the entire passage from memory.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

—Ephesians 3:20–21

experience

SHARE THE STORY

Ask a child to find Hebrews in the Bible; use a bookmark for nonreaders. As you read the story from page 310 in *Shine On*, find the names of those mentioned in the story on the “Faithful followers” poster from the resource pack. Pause in your reading to have different children mark with stickers the categories that fit each one. Persons to mark include Noah (*Old Testament, faced danger, called by God*); Abraham (*Old Testament, traveler, called by God*); Rahab (*Old Testament, protected others*).

WONDER AND REFLECT

Reflect on the story together, pondering the following questions. Leave space for silent reflection, responses, and questions from the children.

- I wonder what is easy and what is hard about faith.
- I wonder about the stories of people we do not know.
- Imagine the great cloud of people who have followed God.
- I wonder what slows us down in our race of faith as we follow God.

PEACE NOTES

As we follow Jesus, we continue the story God’s people started so long ago. Talk about different people from the Bible and how their stories can help us. Some may be an example of how to trust God; some may teach about sharing with others. If children can’t think of people on their own, review some of the people on the “Faithful followers” poster from the resource pack. Then invite the children to write their names on the Faithful followers add-on from page 95 of this guide and place a small sticker in the “Heard about Jesus” column next to their name. Attach the add-on chart to the poster. Talk about how we are part of the story too.



Cloud of witnesses

Hebrews 11:1–12:2
Shine On, p. 310

supplies

- Bible
- *Shine On: A Story Bible*
- Faithful followers add-on (from Additional resources)
- Small stickers
- Tape

resource pack

- “Faithful followers” poster

to do

- Copy the Faithful followers add-on from page 95 of this guide.

explore

MOVE

The cloud of witnesses is the people of faith who support us in our own race of faith. Choose one child to begin as the “cloud” while the rest of the group walks around a designated space. The “cloud” child walks around too, and collects others to become part of the cloud as well. Continue until everyone is part of the cloud.

RETELL

Children can make an accordion book using “The race of faith” on page 3 of the Multiage leaflet. Trace around the figure templates to make the different people of the Bible. Color these figures and attach them to the accordion book. Encourage children to put their own image on the running figure on the book.

supplies

- Multiage leaflet
- Scissors
- Paper
- Glue/tape
- Crayons

LEAFLET

Read about some faithful followers on page 2 of the Multiage leaflet. Children can write or draw their responses to the questions.

supplies

- Multiage leaflet
- Pencils
- Crayons/markers/colored pencils

TALK ABOUT

Divide the group into pairs or small groups. Each should imagine an unknown place and be ready to guide the others on a “trip” to that place. Ask them to think about what makes a helpful guide. What questions might people ask them? What would they want to show people? After a few minutes, invite each pair to describe their place to the rest of the group and point out imaginary spots of interest. Help the “tourists” think of questions to ask. When all pairs have acted as guides, talk about how Jesus is a guide, and share names of people who guide others in your church.



other ideas

- Make a collage of faces, drawn or cut out from magazines.
- Invite older members to talk about how they learned about Jesus and to tell stories about their past.
- Jog behind a leader who takes the group for a run.

bless

PRAY

Gather in a circle and pray the People's prayer together from the "Ways to pray" poster from the resource pack.

God, we come together to worship and learn about you.

(Link elbows.)

We praise you in our joys.

(Stand on tiptoe.)

We support each other in our sorrows. *(Bend knees.)*

In your love we meet *(step in),*
and in your love we part.

(Step out.)

Be with us as we go.

(Unlink elbows.)

Shine through us as we live.

(Raise arms.)

Amen. *(Lower arms.)*

SEND

Send the children with these words from Psalm 52:9:

**I will thank you forever,
because of what you have done.
In the presence of the faithful
I will proclaim your name, for it
is good.**

Make sure to send leaflets and the prayer journals (Bonus Multiage Leaflets) home with the children.



supplies

- Multiage leaflets
- Prayer journals (Bonus Multiage Leaflets)

resource pack

- "Ways to pray" poster

leader's closing prayer

By teaching these children, you are building another generation of faithful followers. Who helped grow your faith? How are you serving as a role model?

Dear God, thank you for Jesus, my loving guide. The road is unknown, but I can always count on Jesus waiting for me just ahead. Amen.

We welcome children by paying attention to their learning styles. Sometimes we need to draw, sometimes we need to move, and sometimes we need to have silence. Don't assume everyone learns the way you learn.
—Theresa McDonald-Lee
Goderich, Ontario