

Hebrews 6:9-20 Our Great God

Introduction

Who are the people who have inspired you? The individuals whose character or conduct or a mixture of the two has given you a glimpse of some aspects of the person you would like to be or the conduct you would like to emulate. I thank God for the consistent Christian witness of my parents who practiced consistently in daily life the principles they taught my brother and I as children. We may have had very little in the way of material possessions compared with many of the other children with whom I went to school, but we had a happy loving secure home where the Lord came first. This is a privilege which I only really treasured once I went to university and learned that my experience of life was very different to that of some of my fellow students. Others here today will likewise give thanks to God for the blessing of good role models in the home in which you grew up as well. There are other people for whom a teacher, Sunday School teacher or youth leader has inspired them in some way, but what they will have in common is that these adults took time to invest in the lives of young people in their care. Other people whose lives have inspired us may be individuals whose paths may only briefly have crossed our own or be others in our line of work whose accomplishments have enabled us to believe that we too can make our mark in the workplace even if in a lesser way than that person has done. A further group of role models may be sports stars or some other figures in the public eye whose accomplishments have impacted our own lives. Eric Liddell, possibly Scotland's most talented athlete to date, is one to whom many Christians would point as an inspirational figure to them. We thank God for the people who have blessed our lives and I hope in return we seek to be those who will encourage others in a similar way as far as we can.

However, human beings are fallible. Even the greatest heroes or heroines have weaknesses and can disappoint us. There are a tiny minority of people who make very serious mistakes and saddest of all some Christians going on with the Lord at the present time were led to Christ by individuals who no longer profess the faith they once proclaimed. The one entirely trustworthy person to whom we can always turn is the Lord Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews wants to assure his readers of the confidence they can have in the Lord. He will never let us down or fail us. He always keeps His promises. He always delivers what He has agreed to do. In life there are people who have genuine struggles to trust other people because of things that they have done wrong. For example, a spouse whose other half has been unfaithful to them may struggle to reach a place where they regain a similar level of trust in them. We might say that they have good reasons to feel like that. In other contexts that may be not as close to home we face disappointments when people of whom we expected better let us down. However, God is faithful, says our author. He is entirely trustworthy. There are various passages of the Bible that declare this truth. Let us look at what Hebrews 6:9-20 highlights about the character of our great God.

1. God is fair (Hebrews 6:9-10)

⁹*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.* ¹⁰*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.* Hebrews 6:9 is a kind of link verse with the previous section about Christian discipleship. That section of the book expressed real concern about individuals who had professed faith years earlier but who were not growing or

maturing in the faith as they should have done. Thankfully, clarification is given in this verse to indicate that the author was not referring to his intended hearers and readers of whom he was expecting growth in their commitment to the Lord and further dedicated service in His name in the community where they lived. Paul in a number of his letters declared his confidence in the recipients' continued progress in the faith. In Romans 15:14 he wrote: *I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.* The Church at Corinth was on the receiving end of some of his strongest criticisms for their doctrinal aberrations and moral failings, but still received these words of encouragement in II Corinthians 7:4: *I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds.* To the Church at Philippi he wrote these more familiar words: *...being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).* Why can Paul write so confidently to fellow believers? Remember the words of Jesus in John 10:27-28: *My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of My hand.* Therefore, there is good reason, based on many Bible passages, to be convinced of the security of genuine believers in their faith. In Hebrews 6:10 the writer turns to these Italian believers and brings a wonderful assurance with a view to strengthening them in their faith. What has God noted?

(a) **Their work for Him** (Hebrews 6:10a) *He will not forget your work...* In life it is easy to focus on our own or other people's failings. It is too often easier to complain about the little things someone has not done rather than the greater number of duties that have been accomplished faithfully over the years. The ability to take note of good works and to express appreciation for them is vitally important. Do you, do I, try and make it a good habit each week to seek to find genuinely good reasons to encourage and to thank people for the good things they have said or done? If this is our mindset then we will be less tempted to develop a critical spirit or a self-righteous attitude towards other people. However, most of all we rejoice that God notices what we are doing. There are many occasions when no-one else will know about something good that we have done. There can be endless reasons why this may be a good thing, because most good deeds are relatively small acts that are common courtesies in daily life. There are other occasions where someone is in need of assistance and it is not appropriate for the need to be made public. I thank God for the people in this church who over the years have given of their time and abilities to assist people in need. Much more has been done by members of this and probably many other congregations that will never be made public. However, God has seen it. God takes delight when His people pass on His love in all manner of practical ways. Do not be discouraged when you think work you have done might have been to no avail. Sometimes we can feel that way, especially if the recipient of our assistance is ungrateful. There is always a gap between our launching an investment into people's lives and reaping a spiritual harvest from it. We thank God for the encouragements we have seen in a small number of people's lives as a result of the outreach activities of our congregation this year.

(b) **Their commitment to practical service** (Hebrews 6:10b) *... and the love (agape) you have shown Him as you have helped His people* In Hebrews 10:24 it states: *And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds.* Christian love, agape love, is not centred on feelings but in practical expressions of care to other people. The ranges of duties that may flow from this motivation are too many to mention. But if a person needs an encouraging word; some of our time or possibly to go out for a coffee or tea, then it is usually possible to think of when we might do what we can; sometimes the assistance required is very practical in terms of specific

activities –where it is outside our competence or where someone else would be better placed – on occasions it is right and proper to invite someone else to undertake specific responsibilities for which they may be better qualified. What is so vital here is that these people had a heart to love and serve others around them for which the Lord was pleased. John the apostle wrote some important words in I John 4:20-21: *If anyone says: 'I love God', yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.*²¹ *And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.* As a church family we have a responsibility for one another to support and encourage each other, especially in hard times. Life can be very difficult as a result of many unsought problems with our health or with some family issues or work pressures. If other secular clubs and societies can support their members going through difficult times, how much more the Christian Church should model that assistance. I thank the Lord for the level of pastoral support so many people have received over the years. We thank the Lord both for the dedicated pastoral team who carry out their ministries so well behind the scenes, but also other members of the congregation who have shown the love of Jesus in so many practical ways to assist those in need.

(c) **Their perseverance in Christian service** (Hebrews 6:10c-11) ... *and continue to help them.*¹¹ *We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realised.* Our work whether in evangelism or social ministries, proclamation of the Word of God or in pastoral care is over the longer term; there some tasks that can be completed in a limited timescale, but the most important work involves perseverance over the longer term. Praise God for the many Sunday School teachers who have given of their time and abilities over decades ministering to the younger members of our church family, or those involved with young adults through those difficult transitional years as they move from being children into full fledged adults. We rejoice in the minority who appear to go on with the Lord in a straightforward manner as they grow up, but we also thank God for those who return to their earlier faith in adult life. In so many of those people the memory of a Christian upbringing or faithful Sunday School teachers or youth leaders comes to mind. The fruit of your labours for the Lord may not be realized sometimes until a decade or several decades later. Paul's words in Galatians 6:9 are so important here. *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.* Different people in this church and others have served the Lord in a wide variety of ministries over many years. I thank the Lord for each and every faithful servant of the Lord who has exercised their ministries for Him.

2. **God is generous** (Hebrews 6:12-15)

¹² *We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. The certainty of God's promise* ¹³*When God made His promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for Him to swear by, He swore by Himself,* ¹⁴ *saying, 'I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.'* ¹⁵ *And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.* Our calling as disciples of Jesus is to keep our eyes fixed on Him. Hebrews 12:2-3 in words so familiar to us states: ***Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*** ³*Consider Him who endured so much opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.* This is the main focus for a Christian disciple to look to Christ; to seek to model our character and conduct on Him and to live our whole lives in faithful service for Him. However, we do not do it in our own strength. The author of Hebrews reminds us of two things.

(a) **The assurance of God's help** (Hebrews 6:12) ...*to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.* The Christian life is pictured as a relay race in which we are members of a team across the generations. We receive the baton of privileges and responsibilities from believers who have gone before us and then in turn we hand them on to those who follow after us. It is never about simply 'you and Jesus' or 'me and Jesus'. We are part of something so much bigger. This is one of the clear themes so prominent in the book of Hebrews. The whole of Hebrews chapter eleven is devoted to it as a lengthy list of men and women, some named and others anonymous who are commended to us as people of faith. Hebrews 11 begins with these words: *Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for* (Hebrews 11:1-2). The citations varied greatly for what was accomplished, but what mattered was that they honoured God with their lives in the context in which He had placed them. Anyone can speculate as to how they might handle living for God in another country or a different religious or political context; or even in a different century! What matters, though, is how we honour the Lord in the place where we live and at the moment in history where we are called to live for Him. We can read the accounts of biblical heroes and heroines; we can also read accounts from church history which can be so inspiring to us of those who have gone before us. No wonder following on from the impressive list of Hebrews 11 the following challenge is given to hearers and readers in all future generations. *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us* (Hebrews 12:1). Can He count on you and me to persevere on our faith journey?

(b) **The example of Abraham** (Hebrews 6:13-15) ¹³*When God made His promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for Him to swear by, He swore by Himself,* ¹⁴*saying, 'I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.'* ¹⁵*And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.* The life and example of Abraham is absolutely central to the story of the Jewish nation. References to it are threaded through both the Old and New Testaments and this remarkable patriarch is honoured in both Jewish Christian and Muslim faiths. His faith journey began as a follower of the Moon god Sin in Iraq. Yet he and others in his extended family heard the call of the living God and accepted the invitation to go on a faith journey with Him. It was also a physical journey out of his homeland to a place he had never expected to go, but in obedience to God he went forward with nothing on which to rely except the promises of God. The struggles he and his wife Sarah went through to even have one child of their own ensured that promises about being the father of a nation with numerous descendants must have seemed almost too good to be true for so long. Hebrews 11:8-12 recounts something of his incredible story. Yet fact as here can be stranger and more amazing than fiction. The detours on that journey to receive the Promised Land would take his successors to Egypt for over 400 years before finally under Joshua did they enter and claim a significant proportion of the land. The example of Abraham reminds us that there are things for which you and I are praying that will take years to come to fruition. There are some people for whom you and I are praying to come to faith that will take a long while before that profession is made. There are church ministries and outreach activities that will be faithfully undertaken for a long time before the spiritual harvest is reaped. The blessings we have experienced in recent decades in this church would never have happened without the faithful sowing of the seed of the gospel by a small congregation in this place over the best part of a century earlier. The example of Abraham and the example of those who served in past years in this place are an encouragement to us to press on with our calling. Our great God helped them to

do what they had to do. The baton is now passed on to us- how will we respond in our day? Will we be as faithful as they were?

3. **God is reliable** (Hebrews 6:16-20)

¹⁶ People swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, ²⁰ where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:16-20).

God is reliable! There are so many things today that are not reliable. How many gadgets that we buy in the shops last for much longer than the twelve months guarantee we received when we purchased them? Not too many! I have a product in my home that had a twenty-five year guarantee and if it lasts to next autumn will have lasted for thirty years. There are some special people in our lives who have been there for us for many years and praise God for that! However, only the Lord Himself is eternally reliable. This section closes with three ways in which God has demonstrated His reliability to us as His people.

(a) **His reliable word** *He confirmed it with an oath* (Hebrews 6:17b) God keeps His Word! In the opening words of his pastoral letter to Titus, Paul writes these words about God. We have a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time (Titus 1:2). Is it just Abraham who was the recipient of all these precious promises? No! Certainly not! The blessings of God given to Abraham are for his descendants as well. His physical descendants the Jewish nation had special promises - but so also do the people who are his spiritual descendants as well. Paul highlights this blessing in a number of his letters. In Romans 4:16 the apostle wrote: *Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring- not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all* (Romans 4:16). The same point was emphasized in Galatians 3 which concludes with these words. *If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed (descendants) and heirs according to the promise* (Galatians 3:29). You and I make promises. I hope that as far as we can that we keep our promises. However, there are unforeseen occasions when we are simply not able to do what we had hoped to do. Circumstances sometimes arise that we could not have foreseen and prevent us from fulfilling our obligations. Praise God that He knows the end from the beginning of human and world history. He spoke and brought the world into being and equally will call time on life as we know it when Jesus returns as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Praise God we can trust His promises. However, there might be a problem! Are we familiar with all that He has promised us in His Word? We can hardly claim a promise if we are unaware of its existence! May we truly study God's Word and get to know His promises and what they mean for our lives. Most of the time they are principles to live by; remember Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 6:33: *But seek first His kingdom and all these things [all that we need] will be given to you as well.* God will never promise to give us all that we want, but He does promise all that we need! Individually, in our families and in our local church and wherever His people are to be found;

(b) **His reliable character** *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.* ¹⁹ We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the

*curtain... (Hebrews 6:18-19). Our character is so important to us. There are people in a court of law who come as a character witness. They testify to the people present about a particular individual in the dock, giving an insight into their character and conduct that they hope will be a positive influence on the jury. Praise God for the people of good character that you and I know. My God raise up many more like them in the years to come! Are you a reliable person who word is your bond? This is most certainly true of the Lord. Hebrews 13:8 reminds us that: *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever.* What certainty and confidence we can have in Him when we grasp this truth about the Lord. In his final surviving letter, the apostle Peter sought to encourage his readers with these words: *His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has give us His very own great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires (II Peter 1:3-4).* Praise God for His trustworthiness! However, our author saves the best to last as he reminds us not only of God's reliable Word and His reliable character, but also:*

(c) **His reliable Son** *where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:20).* Jesus did for us what we could never do for ourselves. Jesus took the punishment on the cross for your sin and mine so that we don't have to face His anger again sin. An older worship chorus reflected on the wonder of this truth for us. 'Within the veil I now would come, into the holy place to look upon Thy face. I see such beauty there, no other can compare, I worship Thee, My Lord, within the veil (CMP778).' In a few minutes in this service we will come to the Lord's Table as the guests of our Lord and Saviour. Have you put your faith and trust in Him? I hope so! Because this invitation is for you; We will eat and drink by faith bread and wine as we identify with our Lord's sacrifice in our place. We will marvel at the wonder of what He did for us and then return all our praise and thanks to our great God who loved us and gave Himself for us, Amen.