Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.
Exploration

CONTEXT

Begin your session by setting the context for Hebrews 6:1-8. Read through the material below and use what you think will help your students best understand the background of the passages.

An infant diet is limited to milk in the first few months. As the baby grows, he needs more solid food to develop properly. Likewise, a growing Christian who only drank milk would grow spiritually hungry for nourishment to help him or her stand up to the challenges before them. Evidently, the spiritual diet of the Christians who first read the Epistle to the Hebrews seemed to be limited to baby food. They appeared to favor the spiritual nourishment that newborn believers needed (Heb. 5:11-14).

The time had come for them to move on toward maturity in Christ. That’s the urgent message the writer of Hebrews wanted to impress upon the hearts of these wavering Christians. They gave the distinct impression that they were about to let go of their faith in Christ. If they decided to fall back intentionally to another religion, they needed to understand that they would be making a foolish choice. The Lord had directed these believers to give attention to spiritual growth. If they willfully disobeyed Him, they would not be permitted to press on toward maturity in Christ. Their cold-hearted rebellion against God would be an insult to Jesus, His Son. For that reason, they would be left with nothing but hopelessness (Heb. 6:1-8).

These Christians needed to choose which path they would take. If they took the path of obedience to Him, they would hold fast to their faith and continue to express their love for Him by caring for each other. Their diligence in service would add certainty to the hope they shared in Him (Heb. 6:9-12). But if they chose the path of disobedience, they could expect to be held accountable for their open rebellion against God. He would judge them because they trampled on the gift of salvation they had received and even insulted the Holy Spirit, who had been gracious to them.

TRANSITION TO INDIVIDUAL STUDY

After you have set the context, move your students into the Exploration time in their Personal Study Guides. There are several different ways that you can lead your students to explore the Scripture.

1. Lead your students to work through all of the Scripture and questions, then discuss their responses together as a group.
2. Guide your students to work through the Scripture and questions one question at a time. Pause for group discussion after each question.

Whichever method you choose, make sure that the students have an opportunity to explore the Scripture for themselves.

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Conversation

After students have worked through the Explore section of the study, discuss what they discovered as they explored the Scriptures.

Call on a student to read Hebrews 6:1-8 from their Bible or their Personal Study Guide, then discuss their answers to the quick response questions:

› As you read Hebrews 6:1-8, what words meant the most to you?

› Identify 2 strong encouragements that the writer is trying to communicate in this passage. (Hint: one is to do something and the other is to not do something.)

Point out that the writer is going to turn up the heat a little bit with a strong encouragement to move from the elementary teachings of faith into maturity. He follows that with a strong warning against people who were walking away from the gospel and thus proving their position outside the gospel.

HEBREWS 6:1-3

Call on a student to read verse 1. We are going to focus on the first part of this verse. At the top of the Explore section on page 36 of the Personal Study Guide, draw students attention to the results from the spiritual maturity research study. Direct students to review the list and discuss how many of the eight attributes are currently present in their lives. Ask for a student respond to the first Explore question.

› What do you see in verse one as the path to moving toward spiritual maturity?

Help your students realize that the eight attributes of maturity that are listed in their Personal Study Guides are all indicators of a believer who is growing in Christ. The writer of Hebrews was encouraging his people to move away from or leave the elementary teachings about Jesus. It wasn’t that they were to forget them, but they needed to press on and move beyond them to a more mature faith.

› When you think about spiritual maturity, what image comes to mind? Who do you think of as being spiritually mature?

Reiterate to your students that maturity in Christ is not about them doing more religious things, but it is about them growing in a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. It’s not about doing more, but loving deeper. Their tendency will be to list a lot of actions that they believe will prove their position with Christ. Maturity will lead to a changed life, but it will inevitably come as a result of a transforming relationship with Jesus Christ.
HEBREWS 6:1-3

Verses 1-3 is not telling us to forget what we have learned concerning the basics of the faith. But just as a baby moves on from milk to solid food, so also do we need to move on to mature food (5:12-14). Beginning in chapter 7 there will be much solid spiritual food: Melchizedek, priesthood, the new covenant, and Jesus’ sacrifice. Believers must lay aside any spiritual dullness and press on to spiritual maturity.

Verse 1 expresses the main idea, “Let us press on towards maturity.” Like all godly pastors, the writer believes that thorough, biblical, doctrinal, and theological teaching is the answer for those who are immature and wavering. He has great confidence in the Word of God! There are no gimmicks that will ever convert a dull heart. What they needed in their day, and what our churches need now, is God’s Word taught clearly and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Verses 1-2 list six things that encompass the Christian’s life. First, “repentance from dead works” and “faith in God” refers to the first steps in the Christian life—turning from sin and to God in faith. Second, “ritual washings” does not refer to a believer’s baptism, but to the Jewish cleansing rituals that pointed to the true spiritual cleansing accomplished by the Holy Spirit (Ezek. 36:25-27). Those washings prepared them to understand the true cleansing of the heart that is at the center of the new covenant (Heb 8:8-12). “Laying on of hands” refers to the confirmation of the gift of the Spirit and the Spirit’s anointing for ministry.

The final pair is the “resurrection from the dead and eternal judgment.” There will be righteous judgment at the end of the age. Those who are in Christ will be raised to be with Him for eternity. Since God is righteous, unbelievers have to be punished. On the one hand God delights in His justice, but on the other He takes no delight in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11).

Spiritual growth is not a matter of self-effort; God’s presence and power will enable Christians to grow, but only if they are open to receive His help.
Call on a volunteer to read verses 1-3. Point out the writer listed the elementary teachings that we should move on from. The list begins with an exhortation to not again build a foundation of repentance from dead works. Illustrate the point by describing the foolishness of builders continually laying the foundation of a building. As important as a good foundation is, we must move on to the next phase of building to complete the structure. The Hebrew Christians were being encouraged to move on from repentance and faith. While essential, they couldn’t stay there if they wanted to grow in Christ.

**In these verses, the writer lists six concepts that we should move forward from. See if you can find and list the 6 concepts.**

As mentioned in verses 1-2, it is important that we know what our foundation is build with and what it is built upon. The writer lists six concepts that the Hebrew Christians were to move forward from. Encourage students to share the six that were listed. They are repentance from dead works, faith in God, ritual washings, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. Read your Leader Prep for further explanation about these six concepts. Since these are foundational, briefly discuss each one with your students.

**HEBREWS 6:4-6**

Read verses 4-6 aloud. Point out the strong warning to the church. This is not a warning about something that has already happened, but a warning about something that could happen. This is a difficult passage to understand so spend some time delving into the Leader Prep section to help you prepare to teach and answer questions students might have.

› The writer claims that something is impossible. What do you think the writer is stating is impossible?

Your students could have a wide variety of answers to this question. This is where you have the opportunity to shed some light on a difficult passage. The writer refers to a group of people who were exposed to the gospel message, saw the work of the Holy Spirit, and even experienced the goodness of God’s Word, yet they chose to walk away from the gospel. From outward appearance, it would seem that these people were believers, but their actions proved otherwise. By walking away from the gospel, they moved away from the only thing that could save them.
Contentment with stunted levels of spiritual development and profession without perseverance were dangerous. Those attitudes could cause spiritually lethargic Christians and people who had not made genuine commitments to Christ to assume they were OK spiritually to the point they had no desire to repent.

Professed believers who demonstrated casual indifference to their salvation instead of striving to grow spiritually and who gave no evidence their faith-commitment to Christ was genuine were holding Him up to contempt (“put him to an open shame,” KJV; “subjecting him to public disgrace,” NIV).

HEBREWS 6:4-6

There are five phrases to consider: 1) having been enlightened, 2) having tasted the heavenly gift, 3) having become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 4) having tasted the goodness of God’s word and power, and 5) having fallen away.

First, they have been enlightened. Enlightened means “to make known something in reference to the inner life,” and here it is God who does the enlightening. We do not enlighten ourselves; such a person has been enlightened. This is a reference to conversion. This is confirmed by the only other time this word is used, in Hebrews 10:32, “But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings.” Some have thought that the person here has merely heard the truth without embracing it. But a comparison to Hebrews 10:32 makes this difficult.

Second, they have tasted the heavenly gift. “Tasted” in Hebrews means to experience fully, not “sample.” In Hebrews 2:9, Jesus “tasted death,” but no one could say that Jesus merely sampled death. In our culture we may think of “taste” merely as “sample,” but this was not the case in first century. Jesus came to know death, just as those here have come to know the “heavenly gift.” “Gift” most likely refers to the blessings that are given by God to the believer, especially the Holy Spirit and His gifts (Heb. 2:4).

Third, they have been made “sharers,” “partners,” or “partakers” of the Holy Spirit (See also Heb 1:9; 3:1, 14; 12:8). “Have been made” means that God has made them to be partakers of the Spirit. God has given them the gift of His personal Spirit. As with the previous terms, a genuine believer is meant.

Fourth, they have tasted the Word of God and of the powers of the coming age. The “powers of the age to come” are the signs and miracles in Hebrews 2:4 that accompanied the preaching of the Gospel. The promised “coming age” of the Messiah has already come, but we also await it’s consummation. The presence and power of the Holy Spirit are proof that the “coming age” has already dawned. As believers, we long for its fullness when our glorious King returns.
The statement made in your Leader Prep says it this way, “If Christ is rejected, then salvation and repentance are impossible since there is no salvation outside of Christ.”

Ask your students to share their responses from the Explore question that follows. The writer shares that the people who have been exposed to the truth, yet walk away from it are sharing with the world that the crucifixion of Christ was a lie. It was not sufficient for their salvation and they continue to search for salvation elsewhere. Thus, they hold Jesus in public contempt.

How would turning away from Jesus bring Him into public contempt?

HEBREWS 6:7-8
The writer ends this section of Scripture with an agricultural illustration to state the point made in verses 4-6.

The writer uses an agricultural story to further illustrate the point made in verses 4-6. What do you see are the similarities and the differences in both scenarios?

As students share their answers, help them to see that the similarities found in both instances focus on the ground and the same rain water feeding the ground. The differences revolve around the product that is produced. There will be people in our churches that go to the same events we attend, hear the same gospel that we hear, and possibly even respond to the same message that we respond to, but that doesn’t mean that they are truly converted.

What would cause the different results from the same rain falling on the same ground?

The point of this final question is to help students understand what really produces the fruit of our lives. The writer shared that the same rain fell on the ground and it produced two different types of vegetation. One ground produced useful vegetation and the other ground produced worthless thorns and thistles. The only implied difference would be the condition of the ground. If the ground is “good,” then the result will be useful vegetation. If the ground is “bad,” then the result will be useless vegetation that will be cursed and burned in the end.

This can be a difficult passage to understand and your students may not understand it all. Don’t worry about having all the answers. Pray for your students and allow the Holy Spirit to work during the week to teach and instill this truth in the minds and hearts of your students.
Fifth, they have fallen away. Understandably, this verse has caused a great deal of discussion since the early days of the church, and interpretations are varied. Yet we can better understand it by comparing it to Hebrews 3:12-14. The idea is a sustained rejection of Christ and His people, not a believer who sins. By all appearances there is real repentance. Yet ultimately they reject Christ and His people. The point is not that God does not accept the repentant. Of course He does! But if someone is in such a state, they will never consider repentance since they disregard the Son of God. So, what should the warning be for such actions? What if they abandon the race and ignore God’s warning? They will perish. This, of course, is the same for anyone who rejects Christ.

“Falling away” is what it looks like from our perspective, not God’s. From His all-knowing perspective, such a person was not His to begin with (Heb. 3:14). From our perspective it appears as if they were truly saved (Heb. 6:4-5) and then fell away. The truth is that they are judged for the same reason they appear to fall away in the first place: they were never converted to begin with. But the emphasis here is to warn all of us, to keep us on the road, and to keep us from quitting. That is the whole purpose of a warning! If Christ is rejected, then salvation and repentance are impossible since there is no salvation outside of Christ.

**HEBREWS 6:7-8**

Verses 7-8 explain Hebrews 6:4-6 and give a common biblical illustration from agriculture. Good trees bear good fruit and bad trees bear bad fruit (Matt. 7:15-23). These verses describe fruitfulness and blessing on one hand, and thorns and thistles that end up burning on the other. There are some who profess Christ for a season, yet turn away. Though there was a time when they appeared to be right with God, their “faith” bore its true fruit, and eternal judgment is coming. An apple tree does not suddenly become a cluster of thorns. Neither does a true believer suddenly find himself denying the Lord. The true nature of the individual is revealed over time. But what the writer knows for sure is that good ground bears good fruit, and bad ground grows weeds and thorns in spite of the fact that both kinds of people have been “watered” by hearing the Word of God in Christ.
Application

CENTRAL TRUTH
Rejecting Christ leads to hopelessness.

Discuss the application of the Central Truth. Remind your students that the encouragement the writer was conveying to the early church was to keep pressing on in their faith journey. The writer of Hebrews was warning them to move away from the elementary teachings of the Word and continue to grow in faith. There will be some who depart from the faith, but those of us who are in the faith need to continue to press on.

NOW WHAT?
Lead your students through the Now What? questions to help them begin to apply the truths that they have learned. Consider sharing your personal testimony of how you came to faith in the Lord and how He’s walked with you since then.

➤ Write down your age when you became a believer (If you have not yet accepted Jesus as Lord, talk with your student minister or someone on staff at your church).

Walk around the room to work with your students as they answer this question. They may have a hard time writing down the age of their conversion experience, but don’t get hung up on whether or not they know their age. Focus more on whether they have a relationship with Him, and be sensitive to an evangelistic opportunity.

➤ In the time between when you first accepted Christ as your Lord and now, would you consider the product of your life to be useful vegetation or thorns and thistles?

Follow up by asking students to explain their answer. Hopefully this prompts them to think about their actions and the kind of fruit they are producing.

➤ What does the product of your life say about your walk with the Lord?

This question is not intended to make students doubt their faith, but to challenge them to evaluate their lives and how they should reflect Jesus Christ in everything they do and say.

➤ What do you need to do to move forward into maturity?

If you have a smaller group of students, try to spend some one-on-one time giving them practical steps to move forward into maturity. If you have a larger group, address this with more general steps that would apply to students in different places in their walk with the Lord.
PERSONAL CHALLENGE
End your group time with the following challenges encourage your students to memorize the verse listed for this session. Memorizing God’s Word allows it to dwell in us and allows Him to speak through His word in our time of need. Also encourage your group to take advantage of the Keep on Digging section to spend some time this week unpacking what it means to persevere in Christ.

❖ Dwell: As Christians, we must be diligent to demonstrate our salvation, and our path toward maturity. Maturing believers must be willing to warn others of the dangers of immaturity and disobedience. We should help others understand that Christianity is a lifelong faith commitment that requires growth and spiritual maturity. Make sure that you are on the right path to spiritual maturity.

❖ Memorize: Hebrews 6:10

❖ Pray: Pray that Christ would give you the strength to move forward in maturity. Ask Jesus to give you the boldness to encourage others to be a great example of Christ’s love. Pray that you would never set Jesus up as a public disgrace, but always as the Savior of the world.

❖ Keep on Digging: Read the following verses to continue to study the issue of perseverance.
  ❖ Matthew 7:15-23
  ❖ Luke 9:62
  ❖ Mark 13:13
  ❖ 2 Timothy 4:10
  ❖ 1 John 2:19