

Explore the Bible Series for November 12: Exhibitions of faith encourage others

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Exhibitions of faith encourage others

- Hebrews 11:1-3, 6-8, 13-19, 24-26

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Hebrews 11 calls the roll of the Old Testament heroes and heroines of faith. Without faith there is no understanding. Faith is the “the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen.”

If things are not seen, how can you be convinced that they exist? The reason faith is rewarded greatly is that it does not see and yet believes. Faith is the foundation of the church, and faith in the risen Christ sustains many.





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The Old Testament heroes and heroines attest to the value of living by faith. They comprise “the cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1) who give powerful testimony to the Hebrews that they should come to faith in God’s truth in Christ.

Faith defined (Hebrews 11:1-3)

Faith is the substance of things hoped for. God tests our faith in the trials of life. The diagnosis of cancer, a hurricane disaster, and the death of a spouse or child require a God-given present assurance of a future reality. The prophet Habak-kuk says, “The just shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4). Another prophet remarks, “If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established” (Isaiah 7:9).

Faith is evidence of things not seen. True faith is not based on empirical evidence but on divine assurance and is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). We do not need faith to sit in a chair as long as we can see the chair. We need faith to believe the virgin birth and the empty tomb. We need faith to believe there is a heaven and a hell. We all have loved ones that have gone to glory, but nobody has received a post card. My faith and not empirical evidence allows me to believe the entire Holy Bible.

Faith is the invisible backing of the elders. The saints of old, both men and women “obtained a good testimony” alluding to the fact that they were

testified to or had witness given about them (Hebrews 11:4-39). God bears witness on the behalf of these saints that they lived by faith, and divine approval is granted to them.

Faith is the creative power of divine works. True saving faith works in obedience to God (James 2:14-26). “The word of God” is God’s divine utterance in that he created the universe out of something that cannot be seen. The invisible something was God’s own energy or power (Genesis 1:1-31).

Faith demonstrated: Abel through Abraham (Hebrews 11:4-19)

The faith of Abel and the infidelity of Cain were sealed up in their offerings. If Abel had not believed in the promise, he would not have chosen and brought the best offerings. He had actually seen his brother, who picked vegetable offerings with contempt and offered them by laying them on the altar. For that faith Abel “obtained witness” about himself “that he was righteous” and certainly not from a human being but from God, “who testified of his gifts,” so that up to this time Abel talks through his faith.

If Enoch had not believed the observation of the commandment could introduce him again to the place from which the house of Adam had come out because of the transgression, he would not have applied himself to please God for 300 years. In fact, “without faith,” if Enoch did not believe that the true God exists and “rewards those who seek him,” he would have never tried to please and seek him.

It is necessary to “believe that God is,” not “what God is.” If “that God is” needs faith and not reasoning, it is impossible to comprehend by reasoning “what God is.” If that “God is a rewarder” needs faith and not reasoning, how is it possible by reasoning to compass God’s essence? Unless we have faith in regard to all things—not only in regard to vengeance but also in

regard to the very being of God—all is lost to us.

“By faith Noah was warned by God concerning events as yet unseen,” that is, about things which would have happened 120 years after he had received the warning, and “obeyed” and “constructed an ark” with great toil “for the saving of his household.” By that same faith the world that did not believe was condemned, and that same faith made Noah the heir of the promise.

“By faith Abraham” obeyed and left his father and family “to go” not to his private estate but to “an inheritance” prepared for him. Constantly supporting himself “by faith” through his wanderings, he “sojourned” and lived in the land of promise as in a foreign land “living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.” Through the promised inheritance, that they did not receive, it became evident that “they looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

“Through faith Sarah herself received strength to conceive, when she was past age.” She, who was barren gave birth, received the powers and youth that were necessary for conception and bearing, even though her old age was unable to cope with these things. And all this happened to her because, in the midst of the pagan Canaanites, she “considered him faithful who had promised” to give her these things.

Abraham was justified not only by works but also by faith. Through faith, he left his parents, country and home. God promises Abraham a child, and “without being weakened in faith” did not look at the weakness of his body but at the power of him who promised because “he counted him faithful who had promised.” “By faith Abraham offered up Isaac,” his only son, to God, believing “that God is able to raise up even from the dead.” And having bound Isaac and laid him on the wood, he did in purpose offer him. But Abraham received his Isaac alive through the goodness of God in delivering to him a lamb instead of his child. Being faithful in these things,

he was sealed for righteousness and received the promise that he would be the father of many nations.

Faith demonstrated: Isaac through Rahab (Hebrews 11:20-31)

Isaac's revelation of faith can be read in Genesis 27:1-28:5. Isaac was blind and 137 years of age, and thought he was near death. Esau, the firstborn, enjoyed the privileges of precedence in the household and at the father's death received a double share of the inheritance and became the recognized head of the family (Deuteronomy 21:17).

Jacob, the younger son, in concert with his mother deceived Isaac and received his blessing. The deceit caused severe consequences for Jacob. Isaac had come to understand that the divine blessings would go through Jacob and issued an extra patriarchal blessing, to whom the Abrahamic covenant promises of posterity and land—quite the reversal of prior wishes and understanding.

Both of Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, received a blessing from Jacob. Consequently, two tribes descended from Joseph, whereas only one tribe descended from each of his brothers (Genesis 47:31; 48:1, 5, 16).

Joseph spent all of his adult life in Egypt and, even though he was a fourth-generation heir of the promise given to Abraham, he never returned to Canaan while he was alive. Facing death, he still had "faith" that God would fulfill his promise and demonstrated confidence by making his brothers promise to take his bones back to Canaan for burial (Genesis 50:24-25).

In verse 23, the "faith" described here actually is exercised by Moses' parents, although it is unclear how much Moses' parents understood about God's plan for their child. "By faith" Moses refused the fame he could have

in Egypt if he would have capitalized on his position as the adopted son Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus 2:10).

Moses identified himself with the Messiah because of his own role as leader and prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15). Moses knew of the sufferings and glory of the Messiah (John 5:46). Anyone who suffers because of genuine faith in God and for the redemptive gospel suffers for the sake of Christ (1 Peter 4:14).

Rahab, a harlot, provided her house for two men sent by Joshua to spy the land of Jericho. God, in his sovereign providence, wanted them there for the salvation of Rahab (Joshua 2:1). Most importantly, by God's grace Rahab was in the Messianic line (Matt. 1:5).

Faith demonstrated: Many others (Hebrews 11:32-38)

The many accomplishments and sufferings described in these verses apply generally to those faithful saints. Some experienced great success, whereas others suffered great affliction. The point is that they all courageously and uncompromisingly followed God, regardless of the earthly outcome. They placed their trust in him and in his promises (2 Timothy 3:12).

Faith: Approved (Hebrews 11:39-40)

The Old Testament saints had faith in the ultimate fulfillment of the eternal promises in the covenant (Hebrews 11:13). They looked forward to the promised salvation, whereas the faith of those after Christ looks back to the fulfillment of the promise. Both groups are characterized by genuine faith and are saved by Christ's atoning work on the cross (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Discussion questions

- If you were writing about examples of faith you have witnessed that future generations could look to as examples, what would you include?
- What examples might others take from your own life?

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