



Living a Life of Faith

An ABF Series on Hebrews 11

A Review of the Life of Faith

An Outline of Hebrews 11

Introduction (vv 1-3)

The author of Hebrews has argued that faith makes the unseen and future real to us in the present so that we can lay claim to the promises of God and live a life that he would commend.

Body (vv. 4-31)

The author shows that a life of faith is a life that. . .

- Pleases God (Abel and Enoch vv. 4-6)
- Stands against the corrupt culture (Noah v. 7).
- Doesn't live by sight (Abraham vv. 8-12).
- Lives for eternity (The Patriarchs vv. 13-16)
- Clings to the promises of God (Patriarchs vv. 17-22)
- Submits to God first (Moses' Parents v. 23)
- Waits for the greater pleasure (Moses vv. 24-27)
- Moves mountains (Moses, Israel, Rahab vv. 28-31)
- God blesses despite sin (Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel v. 32)

Conclusion (vv. 32-40)

- The powerful effects of faith (vv. 32-35a)

- The painful costs of faith (vv. 35b-38)
- The ultimate focus of faith (vv. 39-40)

Don't Quit

Imagine you are a Jew living in the first century. Life as a Christian has been tough, tougher than you expected it to be. Following the Messiah has not made life easier; it's actually done the opposite. Now your own Jewish friends and family are rejecting you and you're starting to wonder if it's really worth it. Maybe you should just go back to being a Jew and slip away from this whole Jesus thing. This is the problem the author of Hebrews is facing, and the case he is making in chapter 11 is that following God has never been easy. If you really want to stand in the line of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and David you're going to have to sacrifice.

In what ways do modern day believers face the same danger of "slipping back"? How does this happen practically? What would the author of Hebrews have to say?

Life is full of challenges, joys, heartaches, success, failure, hope, sorrow, and many ups and downs. The message of Hebrews 11 is that while being a follower of God is not always easy, it is always worth it. We are often unclear about what God is doing in our lives. When this happens, we have a choice to look to our circumstances as our guide to life or to look to God and trust him even when we don't understand him. There may be times we will be discouraged and tempted to quit, to ring the bell. This was a very real challenge for the people we find in Hebrews 11, and yet by faith they stayed true to God by believing who He was (his character), what He had said (his promises), and what He did (his sovereignty) even and especially when life didn't make sense. We must be ready to do the same today.

This paragraph both wraps up chapter 11 by thinking reviewing many of the themes already covered and transitions to the beginning of

chapter 12 which actually tells the reader what to do with what they've been reading. It is seeking to do three things. . .

1. Motivate the reader to action
2. Review what has been discussed
3. Set up the need for the following section

Examining the Conclusion

The Powerful Accomplishments of Faith (vv. 32-35a)

The conclusion of this section begins with the verses we studied last time – the judges through David and Samuel. Beginning in verse 30 through the first half of verse 35, he next points author picks up his conclusion by listing off the incredible accomplishments of faith, alluding to further figures throughout the pages of Scripture. He lists ten powerful accomplishments of faith, and as one commentator noted the first nine break into three triads. The last one appears to be form a transition into the next section.

As you go through this section, ask people to see if they can think what these are referring back to in the earlier parts of the chapter. Some might be too difficult and would be better to simply give the answer.

1. National accomplishments
 - Conquered kingdoms (the people, the Judges, and David)
 - Administered justice (David, Solomon cf. 2 Samuel 8:15)
 - Obtained promises (Joshua 21:43-45)

In what ways can faith make a powerful impact on a national level? In what ways would it be appropriate to apply these truths to America? In what ways would it be inappropriate?

2. Personal Deliverance
 - Stopped the mouths of lions (Daniel, Samson, David)
 - Quenched the power of fire (Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego)
 - Escaped the edge of the sword (David, Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah)

How can faith make a difference in someone's life today? In what ways does faith deliver us?

3. Military Victory

- Out of weakness were made strong (Samson)
- Became strong in battle (Moses, Joshua, Jonathan, etc.)
- Routed foreign armies (Gideon, Jephthah, David etc.)

We might not always see the reward of faith in the same miraculous way that those in Israel did. But a life of faith will lead to God's blessing eventually, and many followers of Christ do see their faith rewarded in this life.

The High Cost of Faith (vv. 35b-38)

The passage transitions in verse 35 by contrasting the fact that some people saw immediate results for their faith, and others had to wait. While some mothers saw resurrections immediately, others died wanting a better resurrection (the final resurrection). These people lived for eternity, even though the cost of doing so was tremendously high. The believers to whom the author of this book was writing were ready to call it quit because things were getting hard, but a quick read through this section would be enough to convict them that difficulty has often been the case for God's people.

Christ warned about counting the cost. How can believers prepare themselves to be ready to endure when suffering and persecution come?

The Forward Look of Faith (vv. 39-40)

The final two verses are perhaps a bit surprising to us. After building up the faith of these OT saints, the author states that these men and women were incomplete. They did not receive "the promise." This promise is most likely the eternal reward of God, the better resurrection, the city that He had prepared. That wouldn't even be possible until Jesus Christ came, because it is through Christ that God fulfills all His promises (2 Corinthians 1:20). While we aren't sure how

clear it was in their minds, the people in the Old Testament were hoping for Christ, the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15), the seed of Abraham, the seed of David, through whom God would fulfill every promise He made fully and finally. So the author reminds his audience that they have been completed in a way none of the heroes he has just read about had. And then in the verses following this chapter, he points explicitly to Jesus as the hope for them.

How is the hope of the Old Testament saint and the New Testament believer similar? How is it different?

Themes of Hebrews 11

As was noted earlier, one purpose of a conclusion is to review where the author has been. In these last few verses we see themes that have been highlighted throughout this chapter being woven together. For example, we find the theme of . . .

Again, ask people where the following themes from previous lessons show up in the final few verses of this chapter.

- *pleasing God* (vv. 2, 4-6) in the phrase “commended through their faith”
- *standing against the corrupt culture* (vv. 7, 13-16) in the phrase “of whom the world was not worthy”
- *not walking by sight* (vv. 8-12) in the phrase “did not receive what was promised”
- *living for eternity* (vv. 13-16) in the phrase “better resurrection”
- *clinging to the promises* (vv. 17-22) “did not receive what was promised”
- *submitting to the higher power* (v. 23) in the phrase “chains and imprisonment”
- *waiting for the greater pleasure* (vv. 24-27) in the phrase “refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life”
- *accomplishing great things* (vv. 28-31) in the list of vv. 33-35a

Which theme have you found to be the most convicting? Which theme has changed your life the most?

Which theme do you think that Christians as a whole need to hear today the most?

Application

The application of Hebrews 11 doesn't show up until the next chapter. There isn't a single command in chapter 11, but chapter 12¹ starts by pointing back to everything that happened in chapter 11 (seeing we are surrounded by a great cloud of people who have been commended²) and gives us two commands: "Let us lay aside every weight. . . and let us run with patience [endurance] the race set before us." However, this is more than just a command to grit our teeth and make it, it is a command to endure by looking to Jesus.

What does it mean to look to Jesus? How do we practically do this? Why do we need to be so concerned about following after him?

In the end, the "heroes of faith" aren't the real heroes, Jesus Christ is. They were waiting for Him, and we have been given Him. We are surrounded by positive examples that should inspire and instruct us, yes. But we don't look to them for hope; we look to Him. The story of Hebrews 11 is not how a bunch of super saints lived lives we never could, but how broken people like us can endure by looking to and holding onto the God who has promised us unimaginable things if we will respond to His call in faith.

¹ The progression of thought from chapter 11 to chapter 12 makes sense for a chapter break, but the author is not starting a new idea. He is continuing what he has been studying.

² The Greek word here is *martus*, which is the same root as the word "commended" as used in 11:2, 4, 5, 39