

“Found Faithful”
Hebrews 11:1–16; 12:1–2
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Let’s look to God’s Word. Hebrews 11:1–6 says *[1] Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. [2] For by it the people of old received their commendation. [3] By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.*

[4] By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. [5] By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. [6] And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

The grass withers, the flower fades but the Word of God abides forever. By His grace and mercy may it now be preached for you.

Perhaps you have had one of those vacations where you prepare and prepare so that you can go and have a great time but if you’re like me you tend to over pack the agenda. You have so much you want to get done on your vacation that when you get home you need a vacation to catch up from your vacation. I kind of felt that way as we recently finished our Global Ministries Conference. There was so many wonderful things going on. There were so many great missionaries of whose stories I wanted to hear and so many conversations I wanted to have. This is the third year my wife and I have been able to be a part of this conference and I would say that Briarwood as a church does missions right. The caliber and missionaries we support, the quality of the conference that is put together, while other churches are completely doing away with missions conferences or pairing it back to only a day or so. I love that we come day after day to interact with our missionaries, learn from them, get to know them and give them our support.

The part I enjoy most from this conference is not the public conversations but the private ones, the ones that take place over the meal. My wife and I make it a goal to look to sit with a missionary we’ve never talked to before over a meal. This year was no exception for I had the opportunity to sit with the pastor from Turkey and hear his story. I had to give him very focused attention because his English was far better than my Turkish but it was a little hard for me to track with him while he was talking. As he spoke I was amazed at his life story.

This pastor was a highly educated man and very successful in his own field of chemical engineering but as a man who had grown up Muslim he loved to read and study. He told me that when he was at a book fair he saw a book that had two words for its title – Holy Bible. He had to buy it. After starting to read that within a week God had already drawn him to Himself in saving faith. He went on to share how little by little he was drawn into ministry and how he began to share his faith in Jesus Christ with his family, beginning with his grandparents who were the first in his family to receive Christ as their Savior. One by one people in his family came to know Christ – his siblings, his wife, his son and finally his parents

He shared with me how his family has all become a part of the church that he has now been called to lead and then he pulled out his phone. He showed me a picture and what used to

be a centuries old building where the church had met, was utter rubble because a terrorist had bombed it just five years ago that destroyed it entirely. Then he showed me another picture of a new building much more like a classroom setting where they were currently meeting openly, freely with confidence in God and worshipping together as a body of Christ, 50 strong.

That made me really start to think. I am amazed at faith like that and I had to ask myself, 'If God put me in a situation like that where faith could cost me a lot, up to and even including my life, would I still have faith that was strong? Would I be able to confidently say 'Lord whatever it is that You want of me I will still follow you?'' That led me this past week to start examining the Scriptures so that I could get a better understanding of this thing called faith.

Often times we use words so frequently and so casually that we don't really stop to say 'what does it mean?' I wanted to know what I thought it meant and what God's Word said that it meant so quickly God led me to Hebrews 11. This chapter is often referred to as the hall of faith. As we look at this chapter the author will take us beyond where he started. The author has already been talking about faith over and over in the previous chapters and in Hebrews 4 the author presents faith as the opposite of unbelief. In Hebrews 6 he says faith is the antidote for dead works. In Hebrews 10 we're told that the righteous shall live by faith. Over and over again he says that faith is the instrument by which lives are changed. People are healed. Hearts are made clean. We gain free access to God through Jesus Christ and by faith we're sustained when what we see here and now is not everything we know one day, which will be ours.

Now the author of Hebrews wants to drill down deeper. I believe in the opening 16 verse of Hebrews 11 the author gives us a careful examination of faith, a closer look of what faith is. In Hebrews 12 he wraps it up with a call to faith that becomes specific to us which becomes our call alone. So we will follow the author's outline in Hebrews 11. He starts out by saying 'Now faith is...' but he stops short of giving us a definition. He will go on to give us observations and characteristics about faith but he doesn't really give us of what I call a 'working' definition of faith so I want to make sure you have one to go on.

Biblical faith is trust or confidence exercised toward God the Creator based upon His unchanging character. The faith of Hebrews 11 is anchored firmly in the character or nature of God. We know God doesn't change therefore our faith can be solid. We know God is holy, righteous, just and filled with wrath yet He is merciful and forgiving therefore we can come to Him in faith without anything wavering. So as we walk through this hall of faith chapter we will do it in the context of seeing how faith is continually anchored to the nature or character of God Himself.

Hebrews 11:1 says *[1] Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* When I was growing up I had the translation that said that faith was the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen and I like that for circumstantial evidence isn't enough to convict anyone but substantial evidence will bring conviction. So here we see that faith is this substantial/fundamental evidence that we need in order for us to understand and believe it's real, even in things we cannot or have not seen. Just as our physical eyesight is the sense by which we can look at this world around to understand or even measure a process as to what we're seeing, faith becomes the spiritual eyesight that lets us see this invisible realm of the spiritual world.

Another way we might define faith is that it is what we measure beyond what we measure with our senses to give us settled confidence in what we hope for with absolute certainty and undisputable proof for what our eyes have not seen. Faith takes the promises of God, apart from

material evidence, and gives us a way to measure them and makes them a genuine reality as we live our lives. Let's continue in the text.

Hebrews 11:2 says [2] *For by it the people of old received their commendation.* The people of old here means the ancient ones, the forefathers, the elders, those who have gone before and the author is quickly taking us into what is a history of faith, going as far back as he can possibly go and walking us back up to a more present time. It was faith though that came the commendation of the ancients. It was that 'well done good and faithful servant' by which they received commendation from God, not because of anything they could do in and of themselves but because they also looked ahead to the work of Jesus Christ, the coming Messiah and by faith believed that He would come. Now the author takes us back to what we may call when time actually began.

Hebrews 11:3 says [3] *By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.* This is what I like to refer to as the historical Presence and it's also all inclusive. The author goes back to the very ancient of days where the creation moment took place. From that moment on if God were to ask any living human being this question He posed to Job, we would have to answer the same way.

In Job 38:4 God asks Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" And our answer would have to be that of Job, with science for we weren't there. There are no eye witnesses yet the author of Hebrews in verse 3 says we understand and come to know with certainty that this universe, this stuff we see with our eyes, came into being by the Word of God so that what was seen was made out of not.

This is called ex-nihilo creation where out of nothing creation happened. I can do a lot of things with my hands. I have built a log house and much of it on my own. I have framed out basements. I can do some electrical although I don't like to do electrical because it's disruptive when you get it wrong. But I have never yet done a single project out of nothing. I have to have some tools, some lumber and some nails. My wife is the one who always makes sure I have everything I need so the project can get started and finished within a short space of time. Yet God doesn't need that. He spoke and it happened.

Think with me for a moment. What was it like when there was just God? There was no universe. It was just God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit alone. God created, not with stuff that was, but simply out of His very Being. He spoke and it was. All that we now see and know became reality and I love how the Psalmist wrestled with this himself. Psalm 33:6 and 9 says [6] *By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.* [9] *For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.* The Psalmist understood what the author of Hebrews tells us. We know and comprehend this by faith. Now the author of Hebrews moves a few decades beyond Adam and Eve in our text.

Hebrews 11:4 says [4] *By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.* We see that Cain and Abel each bring offerings to God but by faith Abel brings an offering according to God's way. Abel took God at His Word and by faith brought the offering to God and it was acceptable, whereas Cain did not.

It wasn't about the items they brought but about the heart condition. Abel understood that God could only be worshipped the way He prescribes, on His terms and not his own. Cain did not understand that and because of that in anger and jealousy Cain's killed his brother Abel. Yet God accepted Abel's sacrifice and counted it to him as righteousness. We are told in this

verse that by faith even though Abel died, his faith still speaks, even as we look at this right now. Let's continue in the text.

Hebrews 11:5 says *[5] By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.* Enoch walked with God in such an intimate way that he saw God with such eyes of faith that God was more real than anything he saw physically around him. He practiced the presence of God 24/7. He was an ordinary in that he raised kids but throughout the 360 plus years he lived he lived before the face of God in such an intimate relationship that the character of God was all that mattered. So much so that God looked at Enoch and said 'This one is different. The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. This one doesn't taste death.' Enoch walked with God persistently and consistently and so God translated Enoch from this earthly realm straight into the Divine presence of God, apart from death. Oh to have faith like that!

God took Enoch because he was pleasing to God. I like what the author of Hebrews does here he wants to really make a point so he pulls out some doctrinal truth. In contrast to Enoch who pleased God we see in Hebrews 11:6 that it says *[6] And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.* As we look at the necessity of faith if you were to look up the meaning of the word impossible in the Greek it's meaning is impossible. It's not hard to do or we can sort of do but there is no way we can do it. There is no way I can be pleasing to God through any activity of my own apart from faith and that's why faith is essential.

We're told that by faith we know that God exist or that He is. My very first seminary class my professor said to us 'Here is something you need to learn and I will remind you of it often and that is there is a God and you're not Him.' God is and I will answer to Him. By faith we know the reality of the existence of God, His nature, His character, His attributes, what He does, what He doesn't do, why He does what He does and why He loves the way He does. We know that God is and we also know grace. He exists and rewards those who seek Him, everyone God draws to Himself. He gives the reward of grace so that we might receive faith.

We need to remember that when we talk about faith that it doesn't originate from us. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:8-9, *[8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* So faith is not something that is inherent in me or something I can come up with or create. Faith is a gift that I receive and everyone that God draws to Himself, He gives the gift of saving faith so that we can be with those people in Hebrews 11, who are those who have lives that are marked by faith. Let's continue in the text.

Hebrews 11:7 says *[7] By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.* Noah received a Divine warning that judgment was coming because this generation had only done evil continually before the Lord and Noah believed what God said. Believing is also a call to action and Noah began doing immediately what God told him to do. Noah started building an ark and for the next 120 years Noah did by his words and deeds proclaims a prophetic message of coming judgment and doom longer than any other prophet before him. Every time Noah responded to the ridicule of the world around him as he alone stood in the face of unbelief, every word he said and deed he did was a continual sermon in shoes so that the world might have no excuse when judgment came, but by that faith he and his family were spared. Salvation became

theirs as he and his family went into the ark. Noah became an heir of righteousness again that comes by faith. Let's continue in the text.

Hebrews 11:8–10 says *[8] By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. [9] By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. [10] For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.*

Abraham's faith was characterized this way. Looking at the reliable nature and character of God when God pulled him out of his idolatrous family background God told Abraham He was going to send him out but didn't tell him where and Abraham packed his bags and immediately went not knowing where he was going, but by faith he stepped out in obedience. He lived in a land of promise as a foreigner. The only piece of the Promised Land he would actually own and would use it was in death, yet he in faith believed that God would deliver what He had promised. How could he do that?

Hebrews 11:10 tells us how and it was because Abraham was looking forward to a different city. He wasn't looking forward to try to put down a house because we're told he lived in tents with his son Isaac and grandson Jacob. This world that they were passing through wasn't home. Instead they were looking for a city whose builder and architect was God. They looked for a celestial city, city that was divine. When we have a faith filled relationship with the almighty God the things of this world began to grow more dim and we can understand how Abraham could look beyond his present reality to take God at His Word because he was rock solid sure in the character of God. This is the same with his wife Sarah.

Hebrews 11:11–12 says *[11] By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. [12] Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.*

Here was Sarah and Abraham both beyond the age to have children yet God had promised. When Sarah hears the promise she laughs in disbelief because it's so unbelievable but quickly that laughter turns to a laughter of belief and joy as her son Isaac is born. This is where it gets even more exciting because they didn't receive just the promised son for instead through belief they received everyone who comes to Christ by faith. That's why the descendants are more numerous than the stars in the heavens and more uncountable than the grains of sand on the seashore.

All these in Hebrews 11:1–12 who lived by faith, lived not by sight. They lived extraordinary lives grounded in the character of God. There is another aspect of faith that the author of Hebrews wants us to see.

Hebrews 11:13–16 says *[13] These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. [14] For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. [15] If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. [16] But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.*

Faith accompanied all these who died in faith to the end. We can look at what God promises from a distance. When we moved years ago from the South to Colorado it seemed we drove forever through Kansas yet suddenly you can see on the horizon this little blip of a bump

and as you drive a little longer it grows larger. As we drove into Colorado Springs we realized what we had been seeing was Pikes Peake which is 14,110 feet tall. We saw it from afar but you could also believe it was real.

Faith often is like that where we see what God is promising us but because we also believe in the character and nature of God, we count Him faithful even when we are not for He is faithful to Himself. He cannot be otherwise so we believe and we pursue Him by faith. People who live this way make it clear they are seeking another land.

In this little vignette of verses it's as though if these people had wanted to go back they could have. If they wanted to put roots down in this world as if this world was all there really is, they could have, oh but they couldn't have because then they wouldn't be people of faith. People of faith understand that if all of what they have to earn is only for this temporary life then this thing is not what it's about. What we call real in this life is not reality. Reality is to come.

The danger of kids growing up in a worn torn environment with bombs going off every day is that is their normal for they think that's how life is, but it's not normal. This sin filled broken world that is hurting and in need of redemption is not normal. Normal is to come and by faith we believe that. We look forward to it. We know there is a city built by God Himself. He is both the Architect and the Contractor. Jesus told us that He is going to prepare a place for us. Jesus also said in John 14:3, *[3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also* (forever).

Therefore when God sees faith like that growing and blooming in the life of those whom He has redeemed, God is not ashamed to be called their God, because He has prepared a place for them to be with Him forever. There is life after life recounted in Hebrews 11 and I encourage you to spend some time in this whole chapter and go down deeper. For the sake of time in this study I also want to look at Hebrews 12, because the author has given us this examination of faith so that we might answer a call to faith in the next chapter. Here is the call.

Hebrews 12:1–2 says *[1] Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

I love the imagery given here for it's as though we could put ourselves under the largest sports arena the world has today and we're down on the playing field as all the seats rise up which are filled with all those who by faith have lived, died and gone before us as they are cheering us on to encourage us to live by faith. I love the use of the word cloud used in this great expanse of witnesses. It is something huge and enveloping. My favorite way to view clouds is from an airplane way up above the thunder heads looking down so the depth and breadth of the clouds below can be seen. The author says that is what the cloud of witnesses are – the martyrs are. They are the ones that have already been there and done that. God's faith sustained them and the author says they are encouraging us to keep pressing on.

You can't do it well if you are going to take on extra baggage. I am not a runner but I do know when runners train they often wear weights around their ankles because it helps to build muscle and endurance as they run with the extra weight on. But when it's time for the race I've never seen a runner have those weights still on because they would just slow them down. So when we run the race we're challenged. You put off everything that would slow you down. So those weights are actually good to strengthen but just not in the race.

There are some things in our lives that are good for us like a job to provide for your family, enjoying some sports for the exercise as long as it doesn't become an imbalanced idol in our lives. There are good things in our lives that the author is telling us that even those good things can become bad things when the good becomes the enemy of the best so you better cast them aside or get rid of them as quickly as you can. Don't just stop there because there is also sin that easily besets and you know the one that is your Achilles heel spiritually so to speak. The author is telling us to go nuclear with the Scripture against that sin. This is not the sin in someone else's life but yours. When the mirror of God's Word hits that sin you deal ruthlessly with it as if at war because if you don't it will cling very closely to you.

As a kid I used to love to run through the open fields at night, but at the same time I hated it for when I was out there running in my shorts through the open fields I could feel that sticky cob web all over me. It just clings so close to me and that's the imagery the author of Hebrews gives here. When you are running the race and something gets wrapped around your feet it's going to entangle you and slow you up.

The Greek word used for cling in the passage actually means constrict. Makes me think of boa constrictors. They kind of snuggle up to you and give you a little hug until they squeeze the daylight out of you. This is another imagery here of the sin that so easily besets us and it is exactly what it does. It kind of looks comfortable. It's not really going to be a problem for nobody knows for the sin that's bothering you, you just deal with it, it's okay. God says 'no way, no how for that is sin that is kicking the vitality out of your walk with the Me.' That sin deserves one thing and that's full on war. Deal with it, lay it aside, throw it away, be done with it. If you need counsel on how to deal with it, then come see our counseling office for we can help you work through it. But we are at war with our sin!

Once we have laid aside the good things that might slow us down and the sin that would definitely derail us and slow us down, then we can run with endurance the race God has set before us. This is a marathon that began the day you were born and it doesn't end until the day you stand before Christ complete so keep running. I have watched marathon runners literally crawl across the finish line but that crawl is still finishing the race. I love that the author of Hebrews is saying this on the heels of this hall of faith chapter because not only has he given us those who have lived and believed by faith but he gave us those who are broken. Sometimes their faith was weak and sometimes it wavered. Sometimes they were up and at times they were down but by faith they continued running the race. That's what God calls us to do. Keep running.

As you run the race, how do you keep running? How can you keep moving when you're exhausted and beyond yourself? We see the answer in Hebrews 12:2. You look to Jesus the founder and perfecter of your faith. You fix your eyes on Him for He is the finish line. He is the originator of the faith you have been given and have received. He is also the perfecter or completer of that same faith. He tells us to keep our eyes on Him for He did it Himself, for the joy set before Him He endured the cross. The joy is that you and I would be redeemed. He endured the cross – the suffering, the pain, the humiliation, the agony, the death, the wrath of God poured out in full on Him so that we might be forgiven – that's what Jesus Christ endured for us and by faith persevered. Now He is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Having looked at this examination of faith and having now considered our call to faith, what are we supposed to do with this? The takeaways for this study are based on the unchanging, perfect character of God and that's the only way we have confident faith. In light of that I have kept the takeaways rather basic and simple.

The first takeaway is that being found faithful is personal. What do I mean? As much as I would love to, I cannot have faith for you and you cannot have faith for me. Faith is one on one and again God gives us the gift of faith as we saw in Ephesians 2:8–9. Have you received that gift today? Did you know that Jesus lived a perfect life that you're required to live but somehow on your own you are to be accepted by God? Do you know that He paid the price and died the death that you deserved to die so that you don't have to die so that you can have eternal life? By faith, have you received Jesus Christ?

Beyond the reality that being found faithful is something personal, the second takeaway is that being found faithful is required. I love our lifestyle stewardship theme that it is required of stewards to be found faith filled – filled up to the full with faith. It's not perfection for we'll have those moments where we struggle and we'll come alongside of each other to wrap our spiritual arms around each other. We lift each other up but we will keep running the race. I want to be a man of faith and I need your encouragement to do that because the things of this life get heavy, get hard and can derail us. But by God's grace together, we are required to be faithful.

The last takeaway is being found faithful is multi-generational. This past week I heard the pastor speak to the students in chapel at Briarwood Christian School. He knocked the Gospel out of the ball park that day. He presented the 'you must receive by faith' Gospel as clear as clear could be. Another thing I like about this multi-generational peace is that I'm a card carrying papa. I have four grandsons and I love when they come up to me and say 'Papa would tell us a story.' They know I love to tell stories, for I make a living with my mouth. When I tell them stories I weave them into the story I'm telling. I put them in situations where they have to think about it and consider what God would do. I help them think about, where does faith fit here? How does understanding who God is help me understand how this story is going to turn out? Faith is multi-generational.

This is good because when I look around at the congregation at Briarwood I see every generation. As a pastor in Colorado Springs I loved the fact that we were in a military community. Do you know what the 20 something year olds were looking for when they came to church? They wanted something real. They wanted truth. I had many meaningful conversations because I didn't sugar coat truth and I praise God that as a church we are known for that for we are a truth centered church. So when people of any age come here I know they are going to hear God's Word carefully proclaimed. Then they will be challenged as to what difference it makes and that's what it's about.

I want to encourage you no matter where you are in this race that God has laid out before you. Perhaps you're days away from crossing the finish line and soon you will be cheering the rest of us on in the imagery of this chapter or perhaps you are young still trying to figure out who you are and what life is all about. I want to challenge you that life is about a relationship with God Almighty whose character cannot and will not ever change. It is a life of faith. Will you live full out a life of faith?

If we as a church live full out a life of faith increasingly our pews will begin to more crowded because we actually believe faith matters so we're going to share our faith in Christ with our neighbors, co-workers, family and friends and this church will teach them well and anchor them well. As that happens they will become that next generation that will carry it on. There comes a time that you pass the baton. Oh and when you cross the finish line, how glorious it will be. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, help us. We long to know You, to walk and to live by faith alone so would You help us be sold out to You? Help us to be so committed to knowing You and Your absolute perfection and in Your complete holy nature and character help us to sell out to You by faith. Lord, the faith You have given us is the same faith You gave everyone in Hebrews 11 and the faith You are living out in us is just as miraculous as that faith. Let us see with eyes of faith who You are and what You are doing as You work in our hearts and lives and we will praise You in Jesus Name, Amen.

Power Point

I. An Examination of Faith

II. The Call to Faith