

Week 21: FORMED Series

Living by Faith in God

Hebrews 11

¹ Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ² This is what the ancients were commended for.

³ By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

⁴ By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.

⁵ By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: "He could not be found, because God had taken him away." For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

⁷ By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith.

⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹ And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹² And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

¹³ All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, ¹⁸ even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.

²⁰ By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.

²¹ By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

²² By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones.

²³ By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

²⁴ By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

²⁵ He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶ He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. ²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. ²⁸ By faith he kept the Passover and the application of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

²⁹ By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.

³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days.

³¹ By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

³² And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. ³⁵ Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. ³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— ³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.

³⁹ These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, ⁴⁰ since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

From this week's sermon:

In the message this week, David highlighted that this text recalls imperfect people who actively put their faith in God (in the midst of some terrible things). And if we read the stories we see that God came through in miraculous ways. He asked us to reflect on how their faith impacted their lives and others lives around them. He then encouraged us to remember that heaven in our eternal home, we are simply passing through this world.

Scholarly Insight:

Guthrie's Commentary:¹

HEBREWS 11, often referred to as the great "Hall of Faith," has become through the centuries one of the church's most-loved portions of Scripture. Poetic in its cadence, panoramic in its

¹ George Guthrie, Hebrews, (Zondervan Academic, 2009), p. 373.

historical sweep, and imminently relevant in its challenge, this chapter calls the believer to faithful endurance by use of voluminous testimony from the lives of ancient saints. The whole of 11:1–40 may be divided as follows: (1) Overture (11:1–3) (2) Movement 1: First Examples of Faith (11:4–12) (3) Interlude: A Faith of Pilgrims (11:13–16) (4) Movement 2: More Examples of Faith (11:17–31) (5) Crescendo and Conclusion (11:32–40) In this passage the author challenges his hearers to live lives of faith according to the pattern seen in those who by faith were faithful to God in their earthly pilgrimages. Two literary devices give form to the writer's challenge in Hebrews 11. (1) He uses the phrase "by faith" (*pistei*) repeatedly, reiterating the phrase over and over again, driving it into the hearers' consciences like a poignant, monotonous melody. Through this literary tool the author focuses attention on the centrality of a life of faith for the people of God. (2) The author follows the form of an "example list," a rhetorical tool used by ancient authors to challenge hearers to action.¹ This device worked by impressing the audience with the extensive evidence that the desired course of action is indeed the best one to take. In the case of Hebrews 11 the author, through his list of biblical examples, provides strong support for his contention that God's people must be people of faith—even in the face of disheartening difficulties.

Cockerill's Commentary:²

In Heb 10:36–39 the pastor invited his hearers to take their rightful place in the history of God's faithful people. From 11:1 through 12:29 he reinforces this invitation by narrating that history so that they might understand the part they have been called to play.¹ His graphic narrative is like a grand mural, beginning with creation (11:3) and concluding with consummation at the final Judgment (12:27). The pastor wants his hearers to be aware of their heritage, so he begins by describing the history of the faithful before the incarnation (11:1–40). He accomplishes several objectives in this part of his story. First, the lives of the ancient faithful clarify the nature of the faith that the pastor would have his hearers emulate. Second, the perseverance of those who have gone before serves as motivation for perseverance in the present. Third, the faithful of old provide an alternate society that counters the baleful influence of the unbelieving world in which the hearers live. It is no surprise that the major turning point in this grand panorama is the coming of Christ (12:1–3).² The history of the past faithful reaches its grand finale in him. By his obedient perseverance he became both the ultimate example of endurance and the one sufficient to enable the faithful—whether they lived before or after his coming—to reach the goal of their pilgrimage (11:39–40) and cross the finish line of their race (12:1–3). Thus, this mention of Christ assumes all that the central section of Hebrews has said about his effectiveness as Savior. It is the centerpiece of the pastor's history of the faithful just as the final Judgment (12:25–29) is its goal.

For Reflection:

From the sermon, David asked us to consider:

- What does living by faith in God mean for us today?
- What helps us to keep living by faith in God today?

² Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Eerdmans, 2012), p. 515.

For Discussion:

1. Read Hebrews 11 aloud together. As you read, which parts (if any) did the Holy Spirit highlight to you? Which challenge or inspire you?
2. Verse 1 describes faith as "confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." How would you put that in your own words? How would you describe this to a new Christian.
3. The writer repeats "by faith," and each time faith is something a person *does*: builds, leaves, hides, refuses. Which example stands out to you, and what did their faith cost them?
4. This list includes flawed people like Jacob, Rahab, and Samson. It also includes people who conquered (verses 32-35) and people who were tortured and never saw the promise (verses 35-38). God commends them all. What does that tell you about what God values in our faith? Does this encourage you to hold on even when things don't work our the way we had hoped?
5. Verses 13-16 describe people who lived as "foreigners and strangers" and longed for a better country. In what ways are we tempted to settle in and treat this world as home? What changes when we remember that this world is temporary and that we are called to live as though we are passing through?
6. Faith in this chapter reaches beyond the individual: Abel "still speaks," Noah saved his family, Moses' parents protected a child. Whose faith has shaped your life? Is there anyone who has inspired you (whether you know them personally or not)? Who might be shaped by yours?
7. Verses 39-40 say these saints are made perfect "together with us." Where do you see Jesus in this chapter, and how does he lead us into 12:1-3?
8. Is there a step of faith God is inviting you toward this week, and how can this group pray for you in it?

Pray for each other:

Father, thank You for reminding us that faith means trusting You even when we can't see what's ahead. Help us to follow the example of those in Hebrews 11 and to keep trusting You through the good times, the hard times, and the times when we don't understand what You're doing. Remind us that this world isn't our ultimate home, and help us keep our eyes on Jesus as we take whatever step of faith You're calling us to this week. Give us courage to trust You, knowing that You are faithful. Amen.

Formation Practice:

As we exploring being Formed by Jesus this series; we want to encourage you to do this simple exercise every day for the next 2 months. It can take 5 minutes or more, whatever you are able to achieve (and as you do it more and more, you'll likely find it easier to spend longer listening and reflecting).

"Draw Near Daily" Rhythm (5-10 minutes)

- **Come:** *Quiet yourself before God.*
- **Confess:** *Be honest about sin/struggle.*
- **Receive:** *Remember what Christ has done.*
- **Respond:** *Take one step of obedience.*