

LESSON 10

AUGUST 8, 2021

UNIT III. FAITH GIVES US HOPE

THE EXAMPLES OF HEROES

DEVOTIONAL READING: Hebrews 11:32-40

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Hebrews 11; 13:1-19

PRINT PASSAGE: Hebrews 11:1-8, 13-16

KEY VERSE

Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1, KJV) .
. . . .

Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. (Hebrews 11:1, NIV)

LESSON AIMS

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Identify the faith contributions of the heroes in Hebrews 11.
- Value the people in your lives who act heroically through faith.
- Grow in your potential to become faith heroes.

KEY TERMS

Assurance (verse 1)—Greek: *hupostasis* (hoop-os'-tas-is): a support, “substance” (KJV), steadiness; confidence.

Faith (verse 1)—Greek: *pistis* (pis'-tis): belief; trust.

Gifts (verse 4)—Greek: *dóron* (do'-ron): things presented freely to another; presents; sacrifices; “offerings” (NIV).

Righteous (verse 4)—Greek: *dikaíos* (dik'-ah-yos): correct; just; upright; by implication, innocent.

Sacrifice (verse 4)—Greek: *thusia* (thoo-see'-ah): victim; an “offering” (NIV) to God.

Visible (verse 3)—Greek: *phainó* (fah'-ee-no): able to be seen; brought forth into the light; to meet the eyes; to “appear” (KJV).

INTRODUCTION

In our efforts to identify heroes—people who inspire us to do better and be better—too often we celebrate wealth, power, good looks, and exceptional talent. The greatest heroes among us, however, are those persons whose outstanding abilities come from within their hearts and minds, rather than without. It is a very human tendency to look at and applaud superficial qualities in a person, the things that sometimes are just an outward façade or appearance that is not a genuine expression of an inner character that is worthy of celebration. Notice that the people who earn the highest salaries, for example, are not always the people who do the greatest good for humanity. In Hebrews 11, we find a heroes list of persons who are commended for their faith in God. In their time, they were only common, everyday people, counted as extraordinary only because of their connection to an almighty and amazing God—a God who can use the least likely among us to accomplish even the impossible. What about you—who are your heroes? What kind of qualities do you applaud and admire most in people? Who are the people that inspire you? Take a moment to think about who these people are in your life and consider whether they are persons whose kindness, generosity, faith, virtue, character, strength, and compassion make them exceptional in the eyes of God and those who value what God values. Do you praise actors and entertainers who imitate heroes, or do you celebrate those who are heroes indeed? We are surrounded by unsung, unapplauded, uncelebrated heroes who have endured challenging circumstances, broken down barriers, and forged new paths. In every community, there are people of faith quietly doing good, start businesses, launching ministries, cultivating stronger neighborhoods, responding to unseen needs, and solving the most important dilemmas of the day. They are not driven or motivated by money or public praise, but by strong, steady faith in God. Who are they? Who are the real heroes of our time?

THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Hebrews 10 closes with a call to spiritual perseverance because God is eternally faithful. After dealing thoroughly with the challenging realities of the life of faith, the writer encourages the reader to identify with the faithful: “But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved” (Hebrews 10:39, NIV). Chapter 10 serves as a sturdy foundation for the powerful argument that unfolds in the following chapter. The writer calls as his witnesses the testimonies of Israel’s most highly regarded heroes and heroines of faith who persevered against the odds, trusting God. Their stories bear collective witness that the great reward of living by faith and trusting God’s promise far outweighs the bitter struggles that come along the way. Hebrews 11 is a salute to the faithful—to the litany of witnesses, both male and female, named and unnamed, who lived in victory and died in faith, trusting God to the end, even when their prayers were not yet answered and their promises were not yet fulfilled. Even though God’s promises were very real to them, they left this life without receiving all that was promised, trusting the God whose promises are not restricted by time, life, or death.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Faith's Existence (*Hebrews 11:1-3*)

KJV

NOW FAITH is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

2 For by it the elders obtained a good report.

3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

NIV

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.

After calling the reader to bold and unshakable faith, the writer shifts to give an easy, workable, timeless definition of faith: "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (verse 1). Just as the eyes reveal the physical world to the seer, so does faith unveil the spiritual world to the hopeful believer. Faith, asserts the writer, is both substance and evidence of those things that are not yet seen. Faith has the power to stand on its own and prove itself. It is this kind of faith that God commended in the elders (verse 2). These ancient heroes and heroines won a good report on the basis of their faith rather than by any subjective or tangible heroics or personal deeds. Faith is so powerful that it gives us our reasonable explanation for the origins of the universe—in that everything appeared from nothing into that which is now visible because of God's word (verse 3). The magnificent splendor we call the universe was not the random, spontaneous collision of space matter, but it was intelligently designed by an omnipotent God from the words, "Let there be . . .," and there was. Faith in this same God links every believer to God and to every faithful believer who has gone before us.

What do you think? Do you ever question your faith? If so, how do you overcome? If not, what helps you to remain faithful?

Faith's Examples (*Hebrews 11:4-8*)

KJV

4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

5 By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

7 By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

NIV

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.

After offering a verbal definition of faith, the writer further illustrates what faith is by developing a visual example of faith and placing a spotlight on notable individuals who trusted God. The text continues by recalling (see Genesis 4:1-15) that Abel (verse 4) offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain because he was more righteous. Abel's offering was an appropriate sacrifice from a humble heart, while Cain offered an inappropriate sacrifice, grudgingly or arrogantly. As a result, Abel's testimony of righteousness still speaks. We hear the witness of Abel's life as we receive the Word by faith some thousands of years after Abel's death. Enoch's faith (verse 5) allowed him to walk with God to the point of walking off the earth into the heavens (see Genesis 5:21-24). This was during a time in history when many men were walking away from God and not toward righteousness. The point is reinforced with one of the most quoted verses of the Bible: "without faith, it is impossible to please [God]" (verse 6a). It is easy to miss the strong connector attached to the verse. The faithful must not only believe that God exists but also that God rewards those who patiently and intentionally seek Him (verse 6b). The next faith lesson is lifted from the witness of Noah (verse 7a), who lived to see his faith and practice vindicated. Noah demonstrated his faith by building the ark and was vindicated in being delivered from the Flood along with his family. Noah joined the sacred ranks of the company of the just who persevered by faith, living with a righteousness according to God's promise (verse 7b). By faith,

Abraham (verse 8) left his homeland to dwell in tents as a sojourner, a spiritual pilgrim travelling to an unfamiliar new land, Canaan. Yet, Abraham uprooted his life in pursuit of God's promise, just because he trusted God. These witnesses are not merely examples for any believer to follow, but persons whom God judged as righteous because of their faith.

What Do You Think? Share examples of two persons whose faith you have observed both up-close and from a distance. Why do you count them as faithful?

Faith's Endurance (*Hebrews 11:13-16*)

KJV

13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.

15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.

16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

NIV

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.

These heroes of the faith all died while keeping their faith in God (verse 13a). They kept their faith, despite not being able to experience or see the full promise of God manifest in their lifetimes (verse 13b). Even when their promises were long delayed or seemingly denied, they did not lift an angry hand of accusation or unbelief against God. They reached their finish line. These men and women were satisfied with their God and trusted Him fully, according to the vision and/or promise of God (verse 13b). Though God's promise was far off, these persons remained strengthened and encouraged by their expectation from the Lord. They embraced the truth and confessed to others that they belonged to God. Those whose lives are fully surrendered to God understand that this world is not their ultimate home (verse 13b). Therefore, they are able to offer themselves fully to God because they are not pulled or distracted by unnecessary attachments to persons, places, or things. Rather, they see themselves as God's servants and temporary travelers

merely passing through this life on the way to their homeland (verse 14)—a better, heavenly country. Many Christians easily become weary and frustrated when gratification and reward for their labors seem overlooked or delayed. They can find courage and inspiration in the spiritual examples of those who remained faithful until death, keeping their focus on heaven—still believing God for promises that had not yet come to fruition (verse 15).

Regardless of what our eyes can see, or our hands can touch, the unchanging eternal truth is that God is faithful. Despite every trial, tribulation, and test, God has decreed an appointed time and place for the fulfillment of every promise. His Word will never fail. God's promises will never return empty, and in His own timing, God will proudly reward the faithful (verse 16).

What do you think? What kinds of thoughts motivate you to remain faithful to God? Share examples that can encourage others to remain faithful.

A CLOSING THOUGHT

Every disciple needs a spiritual example—someone to inspire and encourage their commitment and devotion to God. Too often, we fail to recognize the power we have to influence others for good. Even those who are continuing faithfully in their walk with Christ can be motivated to pursue a closer walk with God and to give themselves more fully to His service. Consider your own witness; will those who observe your Christian walk be inclined to do more or less for God because of your example? The apostle Paul wrote that we are living epistles, “known and read of all men” (2 Corinthians 3:2), meaning that believers and unbelievers alike are watching our lives, our words, our interactions with others, and our commitment to the faith. Be the kind of witness that inspires others to give God their absolute best—an example that will not make God ashamed.

YOUR LIFE

This week, reflect on your walk with God. How faithful have you been regarding the work of the Lord? In which area(s) can you improve?

YOUR WORLD!

This week, considering your personal reflection, share with a trusted fellow Christian and develop an accountability plan that allows you to affirm and update your spiritual progress in specific areas where you feel most challenged.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, help us to see ourselves as Your servants and witnesses to others. Help us to grow deeper in our devotion and more effective in our service. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

CONCLUSION (Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

While reading the background Scripture, consider this question: “Do you have the faith to persevere through a challenge?”

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

A PERSEVERING FAITH

(August 9-15, 2021)

MONDAY, August 9: "Save Your Life by Losing It" (Mark 8:31-37)

TUESDAY, August 10: "Respond to Abusers with Blessings" (1 Peter 3:9-19)

WEDNESDAY, August 11: "Be Faithful Until Death" (Revelation 2:8-11)

THURSDAY, August 12: "Sanctified by Christ's Sacrifice" (Hebrews 10:1-10)

FRIDAY, August 13: "The Inner Life of New Believers" (Hebrews 10:11-18)

SATURDAY, August 14: "Approach God with a Pure Heart" (Hebrews 10:19-22)

SUNDAY, August 15: "Act in Ways That Preserve the Faith" (Hebrews 10:23-36)