

HEROES OF FAITH

A Study of Hebrews 11

by Bill Rasco



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Introduction

Everyone needs role models. As Christians, we need to be able to look to others to discover how we can handle all that life throws at us. Some of us have been blessed with godly family members who model faithfulness for us to observe. God has also placed us in His church – a community of faithful examples.

Anyone who has a copy of God’s Word has a chapter filled with faithful role models in Hebrews 11 – the Hall of Fame for people of faith. Though not perfect in all of their thoughts and actions, they point us to the life of faith that God expects from each of His followers. As we look to these heroes, we discover that we too might become heroes of faith.

About the Author

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Tell Me the Story: Meeting Jesus

Tell Me the Story: Armor of God



Lesson 1

Heroes of Faith

Key Verse:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1).

WARM UP



There is the Baseball Hall of Fame, the Cowboy Hall of Fame, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, the Walk of Fame, and even a Hall of Fame for Great Americans at Bronx Community College in New York City.¹ Each place recognizes the outstanding achievements of individuals. They showcase people who shaped the game, tamed the wilderness, revolutionized the music industry, made it big on the silver screen, or contributed to the development of our society. They were “greats” who stand out in history. We walk through their lives, tell their stories, marvel at their achievements, and celebrate their contributions. We imagine ourselves in their places and wonder how we would respond to the unique challenges and opportunities that they faced.

1 <http://www.bcc.cuny.edu/halloffame/>

People generally want more from life. Hall of Famers show us that more is possible. They show us it is possible to leave a legacy, make a difference, and inspire others to conquer their challenges. The problem is that most people believe that grabbing more of what the world has to offer is the answer. More money, more possessions, more influence, more power, or more control. The problem is that these things, when approached the wrong way, can lead to a very unhealthy place. So God gives us a different sort of desire. It is the desire for more faith.

Wanting more faith should be natural for the Christian. More faith means a closer relationship to God. It means knowing God more intimately, trusting God more readily, and moving in the will of God more quickly.

Take a look at the people in your life. Is there someone that you consider a “spiritual giant?” An everyday Hall of Famer that seems to have a faith that can move mountains and knock down walls? I hope so. I pray you have a mentor or a friend who looks like Jesus in such a way that inspires you to be more like Him. I hope that the desire for more consumes your heart and your thoughts. God wants you to have more. More of Him. More faith. More intimacy in your walk with Jesus. And so God gives us a Hall of Fame for the Faithful to show us what is possible.

Hebrews 11 showcases a wide variety of people who walked closely with God. It is a Hall of Fame to inspire the heart. These people aren't your usual heroes though. They aren't lifted up for their personal achievements or what they accomplished through their own will and their own strength. They are held up as living, breathing examples of people who knew how to surrender to faith. Men and women who risked everything to follow where God leads and give their lives into His hands to be shaped and molded for His glory. They were ordinary people with extraordinary flaws. But they had faith in God. Faith that

was nurtured over a lifetime. Faith that resulted in lives that stood apart from the world and shone with the nature and character of Jesus.

WORK OUT



Faith is fundamental to the Christian life. We use the word *faith* to describe our body of beliefs, our actions, our conduct, and our hope. We talk about faith from the earliest stages of spiritual growth. We talk about nurturing faith and holding on to faith. But what is faith? How do we define a word so central to the life of the Christian? How does the Bible define faith?

As Americans living in the 21st century, we come from a long line of Western thinkers. Western thinkers tend to form chains of logic and make lists in order to understand the world around them. We organize our thoughts and our lives around lists. We shop with a list, plan our days through lists, and even plan exercise schedules and routines by using a list. So when we look to define faith, we naturally look for a list. We often turn to Hebrews 11:1, thinking that we have found the definition of faith because we have a neat little passage that starts out with the words, "Faith is..." But this first verse only whets our appetite. The entire chapter is a definition of faith. The entire chapter explores what faith looks like and how faith grows. It is Eastern thinking at work.

The Book of Hebrews is written to Hebrews, people who don't usually think like Westerners. Hebrews, or Jews, think in the Eastern way of thinking. They use pictures. Remember how Jesus taught? When describing the kingdom of heaven, He talked about a pearl, a shepherd, a field, or a net. When talking about humility, Jesus showed His audience a child. When describing faith, He held out a mustard seed.

Jesus drew pictures for people, because that is the way the culture of the Jews worked. Pictures are used to define important concepts and cement essential ideas.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews uses this kind of language, the language of pictures, to define faith. Read through Hebrews 11:1-6.

Now go back through these verses and look at the pictures that the author draws. *"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."* This is not a simple definition of faith in the usual sense. It is the picture of an unseen God moving in the places we can touch and the people we can see. By faith, we are assured and convicted that there is an unseen force at work in the world. We can know that God is on the move and that He created all that we see. Faith knows God. It knows that God is the Creator. Creation illustrates the truth that He is sovereign. He is in control. He has the power and the ability to do anything that you can ask or imagine and even more (Ephesians 3:20). Faith tells us that God has reached into the lives of men by creating the ground on which we walk, the air that we breathe, and the beauty that we see all around us in nature. Faith tells us that God walks in the lives of men today, bringing understanding of Who He is. Faith assures us that God is real and moving in our lives.

In Hebrews 11:4-6, we find our first pictures of people who walked by faith. Abel knew God and what God desired. Abel trusted that God's way was the best way to live, so he sacrificed what was acceptable to God. Even though it brought physical death, Abel trusted God's authority and plan. Enoch walked with God, and never saw death. He trusted God to lead him, and God worked powerfully in his life. Faith trusts that God knows what is good. Faith trusts that God's way is the best way. Faith trusts that God's purpose is perfect. Faith trusts that God empowers His plans and keeps His promises. Hebrews 11:6 tells us that in order to please God and draw near to Him in relationship,

we must know that He exists, and trust that He is moving in our lives to reward His people.

Faith knows God. Faith trusts God. And faith moves with God. That is what the rest of Hebrews 11, and the rest of this study, is about. The Hebrew writer now begins to paint a variety of pictures that illustrate what it means to walk by faith. It is a Hall of Fame meant to inspire us to live faith-full. A picture of people who move in the will of God. Movement is so important to faith. To move with God is to follow His lead. To listen to His voice. Moving with God requires us to surrender our lives into His power and move at His direction.

Faith = Know + Trust + Move

It is an equation that we see worked out in the lives of the Heroes of Faith found in Hebrews 11. It is an equation that helps us learn how to nurture faith. From Noah to Abraham, Moses to Gideon, to the unnamed heroes, there are amazing stories of men and women of faith who have walked with God, pleased God, and been on intimate terms with the Lord of all Creation. And so can we.

COOL DOWN



From the very beginning, God has desired to live in relationship with man. In Genesis 2, we see that God created a garden in which He could walk and talk with man. In Genesis 3, that man fell, that man rebelled against the will of God and sinned. But that doesn't mean that God's plan changed. That doesn't mean that God changed His mind about wanting to walk with you. God loves you, and wants you to be

a part of His heart. But that means letting go of control and of self, and learning to nurture faith.

Like any growing thing, our faith needs nurturing. Like a plant needs water, a body needs food, and a child needs love to thrive, faith needs be planted and cared for in order to grow. Obedience, peace, boldness, and integrity are the fertile ground where faith thrives. These are the characteristics and practices that feed faith so that it comes alive in our lives. These are the things that God uses to draw us ever closer to Him.

The Heroes of Faith in Hebrews 11 draw a number of pictures to inspire and challenge our faith. They are not just examples on a page. They are living, breathing people, people like you and me, who have learned how faith can grow and bloom into a thing of beauty.

Want more faith? Then get ready. Hebrews 11 will teach us how to be Heroes of Faith.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe someone who is a “hero of faith” to you. What is it about their faith that captures your attention?
2. Which of the heroes of faith painted into Hebrews 11 is your favorite? What is it about their faith that speaks so deeply to your own journey of faith?
3. Define faith.
4. How does knowing God help our faith to grow and deepen?
5. Why is trusting God an essential piece of vibrant faith?
6. In what way will our willingness to move with God enlarge and strengthen our faith?