



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found, and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

HEBREWS

Lesson 11

Well, we've finally arrived at one of my all-time favorite chapters in the New Testament. Hebrews chapter 11 has been called the "Walk of Faith," "Heroes of Faith," and the "Hall of Faith." In chapter 10:37-38 the writer quotes Habakkuk 2:3-4, which says, "the just shall live by faith." This chapter is a summary, or a sermon, of what that means. The writer gives us some very vivid pictures of faith being lived out in the lives of people. Living by faith involves an active, courageous trust in God. "It means recognizing that the invaluable is often invisible. It means obeying God, whose voice can be heard even though His face cannot be seen." (Snell)

As we go through this chapter, we probably won't be able to spend as much time as you want on each Bible character or story. Since we can't do a whole lesson on each person, make sure you take the extra time needed to look further into any of the lives that we discuss this week. I pray that each character will challenge and strengthen you as you examine your own faith. Do you think you're in anyone's "Heroes of Faith" list?

First Day

1. Read Hebrews 11:1-40. What would you say is the main point of this chapter? What would you title it?
2. After observing this chapter, list some of the facts you found.

3. List any repeated words, thoughts, or phrases.
4. How many times is the word "faith" used?
5. This chapter is a great reminder to us that real faith is active rather than passive. After each name list the word from the text that shows us the "action" their faith produced.
 - a. Abel: offered (example)
 - b. Enoch:
 - c. Noah:
 - d. Abraham:
 - e. Sarah:
 - f. Abraham: (vs 17)
 - g. Isaac:
 - h. Jacob:
 - i. Joseph:
 - j. Moses:
 - k. Rahab:
6. Did all the men and women that lived by faith have a "happy ending" in this life? According to verses 32-40, what happened to some of them?
7. Upon first reading, how did this chapter speak to your heart, specifically?
8. Do you think you "live by faith"? Why or why not?

We'll look at this further tomorrow. For now, let's ask the Holy Spirit to prepare our hearts to hear and understand all He has to say to us. May we be willing to be honest and open with the Lord. And with ourselves.

Memory Verse of the Week: "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." Hebrews 11:6

Second Day

Work on your memory verse. It's one of my favorites!

1. Read Hebrews 11:1-40. Then go back and read verses 1-3 again. How does the writer describe, or define, faith? Can you explain it in your own words?

The word "substance" can also be defined as "being sure of" or "to stand under, to support." The verse would then read, "Faith is being sure of what we hope for." The word "evidence" means "certainty or conviction." Faith is assurance and certainty. Wiersbe wrote, "Faith is to a Christian what a foundation is to a house: It gives confidence and assurance that he will stand. When a believer has faith, it is God's way of giving him confidence and assurance that what is promised will be experienced."

The writer seems to be contrasting faith with the sin of unbelief that he has been warning them about in the previous chapters. All the people in this chapter that he commands have placed their undivided and complete confidence in God. Faith is holding on to the promises of God, depending on His Word, and staying faithful and true to the one, true, Living God!

2. What did the faith of the "elders" or the "forefathers" gain from God?
3. Jeff Snell wrote, "Living by faith means recognizing that the invaluable is often invisible. It means obeying God, whose voice can be heard even though His face cannot be seen." What does he mean?

Regarding verse 3, Wayne Jackson wrote, "Faith is rational. By faith we understand that the universe is not self-existent; it was designed by the Creator." Faith involves trusting our Maker. The writer now gives us some models of men and women who have lived a life of faith. I pray we would be challenged by each "hero of faith." Today we will learn about Abel, Enoch, and Noah.

4. Read Hebrews 11:4-7. Read the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4:1-15 and give a brief summary. According to verse 4, why was Abel's sacrifice more acceptable? What word is used to describe Abel? (Also, read Matthew 23:35)

5. Cain is often described as someone who was religious, but not righteous. What does that mean? (Which one describes you?)

Many explanations have been given to explain why Abel's sacrifice was "better, greater, or more important" than Cain's. The writer simply tells us that Abel's offering was given with a true heart of faith, whereas Cain's was not. Abel's faith allowed him to be considered "righteous." Bruce wrote, "Sacrifice is acceptable to God not for its material content, but in so far as it is the outward expression of a devoted and obedient heart." This reminds us how important it is to have a right attitude toward God as we offer Him our love and service.

6. When you give your time or money as an offering or sacrifice to God, is it always acceptable? Is it usually given out of love and devotion or guilt and compulsion?

7. Read Hebrews 11:5-6, along with Genesis 5:21-24. Why did Enoch get to go to Heaven without physically dying? Who else got to do that? (2 Kings 2:11)

8. According to verse 6, what must we have in order to please God? Why? What are we promised if we diligently seek Him?

Stedman wrote, "It is impossible through human reasoning or scientific searching to find God. Faith in God's self-revelation is essential. Faith means turning from human wisdom to God's revelation and walking in daily obedience to it until it leads to a fellowship which death cannot interrupt!" This is what we learn from the example of Enoch!

9. In verse 7 why is Noah used as an example of faith, especially in regard to seeing the invisible?

Noah is the first person to be called "righteous" in the Scriptures (Genesis 6:9). Noah's example of persistent, obedient, and enduring faith is an amazing example to us all.

10. How can the story of Noah be an encouragement to you in a present situation?

That's it for today. I'm excited because we get to meet some great people tomorrow. Don't forget that without faith, it is impossible to please Him!

Third Day

What's your memory verse?

1. Read Hebrews 11:1-40, concentrating on verses 8-19. The writer picks out a few "highlights" of Abraham's life and comments on them. Why did he choose these events and what was the writer's point?
2. Why is the phrase "not knowing" the key in this section? (What didn't he know?)
3. Read Genesis 12:1-4. Did Abraham respond immediately to the Lord's command? What does this tell us?
4. Did Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob ever get to see God's promise of inheriting the land fulfilled in their time?
5. What did they keep their eyes on? Did they believe God's promises?

"Abraham received God's promise that he would be the heir of a place God would give him. That place was the land of Canaan. Abraham traveled from Haran to Canaan, leaving his relationships behind in Paddan Aram. He lived in the southern part of Canaan in a tent. He remained an alien and, in a sense, an outsider who had little in common with the local population. That Abraham lived in a tent indicated that he was a wandering herdsman who possessed countless animals but no land. Yet God had promised the land to Isaac and to Jacob. For three generations the heirs of the land lived in faith with a promise. Not until the twelve tribes of Israel entered the land under the leadership of Joshua were they able to claim the promise and make their land their own. His stay may have been temporary, but his faith was enduring." Abraham was a pilgrim and a stranger on this earth.

6. Although Abraham lived in a tent, he looked forward to a different kind of dwelling place, a permanent one. How is it described? Where is it?
7. Read Genesis 18:1-15. What other details are given about when Sarah was promised a child? Why is she listed here in this "faith" chapter?
8. Read Genesis 22:1-19 and briefly describe this story about Isaac. Why did it take so much faith on Abraham's part to do what he did?

Each of these examples of faith given in this chapter has one thing in common: each one is unusual. It is not the normal reaction ordinarily expected of those who face these situations. "Faith makes people act differently than others." (Stedman) Abraham even trusted God when He promised him a child. Romans 4:19 says, "Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead ... and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God."

These people believed God when they didn't understand how things could happen. They expected God to fulfill His promises even if they never saw them fulfilled. They all showed unwavering obedience and trust. He told Abraham that he would be an heir, and he never saw it happen. He promised him he would have many descendants, when he didn't even have a son. He promised him a son when he was too old. He told him to sacrifice Isaac, who was the only one in which the promise could be fulfilled. Abraham obeyed anyway, believing that God could do anything, even raise Isaac from the dead, if He wanted to.

9. Has God ever asked you to leave something safe or familiar, or go somewhere you didn't want to go, or do something that made no sense? How did you respond? (Has God ever asked you to do something that seemed to contradict what He's already told you?)

10. How quick are you to respond when God speaks to you about something? How completely do you obey when you don't understand, or like, what God is doing? (Is that happening right now?)

11. Are your eyes focused on the Heavenly city that awaits us? Abraham longed for home, knowing that Heaven was the ultimate destination of his journey. Are you keeping your eyes on the promises of the future? Have you received and embraced the promises? How do the promises of the future help you live your life in the present?

12. Last question. "In an amazing display of faith, he reasoned that God was God enough to achieve His promise without contradicting His command." What does that mean? (Do you believe that "God is God enough")?

I am so humbled by the man Abraham. He wasn't perfect, but he definitely knew his God, believed his God, and trusted his God. How about you?

Fourth Day

Continue to work on your memory verse.

1. Read Hebrews 11:1-40. Go back and read verses 20-31. What characters do we meet?

Abraham's son, grandson, and great grandson are all listed as heroes of faith. They exhibited their faith in God by believing the promise that God had given Abraham, looking to the future and believing the invisible. All three died without having entered the Promised Land. Isaac was a nomad: Jacob was an exile in Egypt, and although Joseph was great, he was still in a strange land. But they never doubted that God's Word would come true, because He would never break a promise. These three men died faithful and hopeful men.

In Genesis 26:4, God gave the same blessing to Isaac that He gave to Abraham. And Isaac, in turn, repeated this promise almost word for word, to his son Jacob (Genesis 28:3-4), who then pronounced the blessing on his sons, Joseph being one. (Genesis 48:1,21). The writer, however, doesn't choose to mention the time that Jacob blessed his own son Joseph, but instead recalls when he blessed Joseph's sons.

2. Here we have four generations of faith. Not perfect, but men who were committed to God and His Word. If you are a mom, are you passing your faith and trust in God on to your children? Have you made that your number one goal and purpose as a mom? Why is this so important?
3. Why do you think Joseph wanted his bones buried in Canaan rather than Egypt? Read Genesis 50:24-25, Exodus 13:19, and Joshua 24:32. Who brought up his bones, and where was he buried? Why do you think that Joseph, after all the amazing things he did, was put in this chapter because he wanted them to move his bones?
4. Read Hebrews 11:23-29. Why were Moses' parents listed? Why did this take faith? (Exodus 2:1-10) How does this encourage you as a parent?

5. Read Exodus 2:11-15, 10:28, 12:21-28, and 14:13-31. In your own words briefly explain the reasons that Moses was named in this chapter. Why did it take faith to do what he did?

6. According to verse 26, what did Moses think was more important than riches? Did he care more about earthly glory or the people of God? How did his perspective strengthen his faith? Is your heart set on the "riches of this world" or the Heavenly reward that is promised to you?

God rewards true faith; that's a promise. Vance Havner wrote, "Moses chose the imperishable, saw the invisible, and did the impossible." Wiersbe said, "Faith brings us out, takes us through, and brings us in."

The writer of Hebrews passes over the 40-year journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. Remember that he already told us what God thought about their unbelief in chapters 3 and 4. Remember, all those over 20 except Joshua and Caleb died in the desert. Our writer now takes us to a time when the fighting is done by their sons and daughters!

7. Read Hebrews 11:30-31 and Joshua chapters 2 and 6 to learn the story of the walls of Jericho and the harlot, Rahab. After you read it, answer the following questions:
 - a. Briefly describe how the walls fell down.

 - b. Why is Joshua's faith commended? How did he show faith?

 - c. How is the story of Jericho a reminder that with God, nothing is impossible? Are you facing a gigantic wall? How does this encourage you?

- d. How did Rahab show faith in God?
- e. What did she say in Joshua 2:11? Why did God see this simple confession as a sign of faith?
- f. Because of her faith, God put her in a privileged position. Read Ruth 4:21 and Matthew 1:4-6. Who did she marry and have as a son? Whose bloodline was she in?
- g. How does the story of Rahab show us that faith knows no barriers? (Remember, she was a pagan, a prostitute, and a woman!)

I love both of these stories so much! Joshua and the Israelites simply put their faith in God when the situation looked impossible. I'm not sure I would have been able to do what they did. God is so loving that He not only chose a prostitute for the job, but He placed her in the genealogy of His Son. Wow. That's really all I can say. Wow. See you tomorrow.

Fifth Day

Write out your memory verse.

1. Read Hebrews 11:32-40. The writer seems to let his mind wander for a minute and remember all the different stories of faithful people. Why can't he expound on all of them?
2. In verses 32-34 the writer lists the names of Gideon (Judges 6 and 7), Barak (Judges 4 and 5), Samson (Judges 13-16), Jephthah (Judges 11 and 12), David (1 Samuel 16:1-13), Samuel (1 Samuel 1), and the prophets. Choose one of these men and read their story. Briefly tell their story and explain why the writer would place them in the hall of faith. Have fun!

3. From verses 33-34 list some of the phrases the writer uses to describe the actions of some faithful people. (Can you think of any men or women that he might be talking about?)

As the writer threw out many phrases, the readers probably knew whom he was talking about. They were very familiar with the history of their people. Barclay writes, "The word used for 'subdued or mastering' kingdoms is what Josephus, the Jewish historian, used of David. The phrase used for 'worked righteousness' is the description of David in 2 Samuel 8:15. The expression used for 'stopping the mouths of lions' is that used of Daniel in Daniel 6:18, 23. The phrase about 'quenching the violence of fire' goes straight back to the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego in Daniel 3:19-28. To speak about 'escaping the edge of the sword' was to direct men's thoughts to the way in which Elijah escaped threatened assassination in 1 Kings 19:1 and Elisha in 2 Kings 6:31. The trumpet call about being 'strong in warfare' and routing the ranks of the aliens would immediately make men think of the unforgettable glories of the Maccabaean days."

4. In verse 35b through verse 38, there is a definite shift. Can you tell what it is? What are some of the phrases the writer uses to describe what others endured for their faith?

The writer moves from specific to more general occurrences. These horrible practices were, sadly, very common for Jews who became followers of Christ. Nowhere in Scripture does it talk about anyone being "sawed in two," but tradition tells us that Isaiah was cut in half with a wooden saw, during the reign of Manasseh. It's important to see that not all these heroes were delivered from death. God dealt differently with them than He did with Moses, Gideon, or David. Scripture shows us that many were not delivered from their horrible circumstances, yet God honored their faith. It's a shame when people who have not been "delivered" or "healed" from their pain or circumstance are looked at as though it is their fault because of their "lack of faith." What would these men, who were tortured and killed for their faith in Christ, have to say about that? Please, never make that mistake or judgment on another. That's in God's court.

5. Read verses 39-40. He commends these heroes of faith and now includes his readers in his exhortation. What will the Old Testaments believers and we, the New Testament believers, inherit together? How is he trying to show the unity that we share?

We know that the word "better" relates to the "fulfillment in Jesus Christ." The Old Testament believers looked forward to this fulfillment, and we look back on the fulfilled and accomplished work of Christ. We are one in faith! They only had "fragments" of God's revelation, while we have God's full revelation in Christ. Do we truly understand what we have?

6. How does this chapter encourage you? Humble you? Challenge you?

7. Is there someone in your life whose faith you admire? Why?

8. Are you lacking faith in an area of your life? What are you going to do about it? How can you increase your faith?

I wish we could spend all year just on this chapter. I've done my best to walk us through it in a week, but I fear that I have failed miserably! There is so much more to say, so much more to learn. Go deeper in areas that you felt God speaking to your heart. Find out more about these "heroes" and how their lives can be examples to us. Don't stop here. Listen and learn from each one!

"A small spark of light led them to Heaven; when the Sun of Righteousness shines over us, with what pretence can we excuse ourselves if we still cleave to the earth?"

John Calvin