

Keep Moving Forward Series

Move Forward in Faith (Hebrews 11:1-3)

By
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At A Glance:

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

Move Forward in Faith

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Changing the Direction of CAC

1. About five years ago, in the wake of COVID, the elders started to have conversations about a difficult, but necessary, change of direction for Community Alliance Church. As each of the elders expressed disappointment with the spiritual results we were getting from our current ministries and methods, we decided to go through the challenge of moving in a healthier direction. We wanted to see more lives being transformed by Jesus than we were currently seeing. To get better results, we needed a better direction.
2. In these conversations, the elders knew the dangers and difficulties that come with change. We knew there would be a cost involved with attempting to get healthier. People might leave. Finances could get tight. Resistance will happen. Discomfort will be felt. Disagreement is sure to follow. Anger could arise. Courage and perseverance would be needed. All this was the cost that would have to be paid, and we knew it.
3. Despite these challenges, the elders made a conscious decision to trust that God would take care of us through it all. We were convinced that a change of direction was what God wanted from us as a church. The elders started learning, planning and stepping out in faith. That was five years ago.
4. Even now, we are still living with a strong trust in God—that He will continue to provide what we need to become the church He wants us to be. We are trusting that God will work in us and through us. We've updated our mission statement, developed core values that will guide our decisions and practices, and are beginning to implement our discipleship and leadership development plans. We are doing all this, trusting God will move in people's hearts as we invest in His kingdom.

B. A healthy Christian life is a life lived with a strong and confident trust in God and His word. The concept of faith saturates every page of the Bible. Those who expressed faith were praised by Jesus. When Jesus returns, He said He will be looking to find faith on the earth. Trust in God is a quality that is valued and emphasized by God.

C. If we want to live a healthy Christian life in a way that pleases God, we must learn how to live with an active trust in God—called faith. This topic is so important that the author of Hebrews spends a little over a chapter explaining what faith is and why it is important. We can't just give lip service to trusting God; we need to implement and practice it when the pressure of life is pressing in on us. We can learn how to live by faith every day in Hebrews chapter eleven.

II. The Nature of Faith (Heb. 11:1-3)

A. As we've been looking at the major themes found in the book of Hebrews, we've seen that God cares deeply about how we respond to His word. The Holy Spirit is continuing to speak to disciples today through the message of the Old Testament. God the Father has most recently communicated the most important elements of His message to humanity through Jesus—whose message is recorded in the New Testament. God's divine message moves us toward the

blessings of God. These blessings are provided to us and secured through Jesus and what He's done for us. Through Jesus, God makes wonderful promises of blessing that we can rely on, no matter how our lives play out. Disciples should hold on to their confidence in God because He will fulfill each one of His promises. These are the major themes we've covered so far from the book of Hebrews.

- B. The fifth major theme of Hebrews is faith. Faith is a foundational element of relating to God (Heb. 6:1). An attitude of active trust in God begins when we hear the word of God and respond by accepting God's message as reliable and true (Heb. 4:2). Faith is a defining characteristic of a righteous lifestyle (Heb. 10:38). While foundational and central, faith is commonly misunderstood. It is critical for us to allow the Bible to describe what the nature of faith is according to the way God works. While many misunderstandings exist around faith, we can gain clarity by learning what the Bible says about trusting God. Remember, faith is a response to God communicating His word—most critically through Jesus (Heb. 1:1-3). God communicated a message to Abraham, and Abraham's faith is described as, “⁶Then he believed in the Lord; and He [God] credited it to him as righteousness.” (Gen. 15:6).
- C. Here is how faith is described:
 - ¹ Now faith is *the* certainty of *things* hoped for, a proof of things not seen. ² For by it the people of old gained approval. ³ By faith we understand that the world has been created by the word of God so that what is seen has not been made out of things that are visible. (Heb. 11:1-3)
- D. Let's begin our understanding of faith by observing the words that are used to describe it. These descriptors include “certainty” (v. 1), “proof” (v. 1), and “understand” (v. 3). Immediately, we recognize that some people's view of faith is not compatible with the Biblical understanding of faith. Faith is not blind wishful thinking to help us feel better. Faith is not a mere act of will as a person simply chooses to believe something. Faith is not, as some define it, “belief without evidence” or “pretending to know things you don't know”.¹ The more knowledge a person has, the stronger their faith will become. God regularly provides reasons for a person to trust what He says.
- E. Faith is compatible with evidence that makes someone fully agree, understand, and realize the truth or validity of something—especially based on argument or discussion (“a proof of things not seen”, v. 1).² A proof carries the sense of convicting evidence.³ Contrary to the thinking of many, even disciples, faith is perfectly harmonious with evidence, knowledge, understanding, truth, logic, and argumentation according to God and the Bible. All these intellectual activities are involved in the development and expression of trust in God—faith. An intellectual pursuit of God directs its' focus toward non-physical realities, or “things not seen”/ non “visible”. It is entirely appropriate for disciples to apply their mental abilities to discerning and understanding

¹ Peter Boghossian *A Manual for Creating Atheists* (Durham: Pitchstone Publishing, 2013), 21

² Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Hebrews 11:1 “a proof”

³ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Hebrews 11:1 “a proof”

spiritual realities, including God.⁴ The author of Hebrews will expand on the intellectual elements of faith a little later in this chapter.

- F. Our trust in the message of God convinces us and helps us understand the meaning of how God has created the world and has designed it to work (“By faith we understand that the world has been created by the word of God”, v. 3). In all this, faith is not contrary to the use of our mind—which was given to us by God! There are non-physical, unseen with the senses, realities that powerfully influence and impact our world (God being one of them). People do themselves a great disservice by assuming the only features of the world that exist are physical ones. God, as a non-physical person, created all that we can see, and understanding this reality makes all the difference in our lives.
- G. Simply put, faith is having a strong confidence in and reliance on God and His word because He is understood (“Now faith”, v. 1 and “By faith”, v. 3).⁵ What motivates this strong confidence? The accurate use of our mental capabilities to discern and learn about truth. The evidence and support for God’s existence and the reliability of His word increases the strength of our confidence and trust—our faith. This trust then impacts our actions and how we live. This is the Biblical description of faith. Any other understanding of faith that is contrary to this is not Biblical.
- H. Once a person comes to realize Christianity is true and reliable, this discovery powerfully moves us forward with God. I experienced this impact for myself. I was won to Jesus with an emotional appeal. I was scared of going to hell, and I knew I was guilty before God. This way of doing evangelism isn’t wrong per se, but it did have a negative effect on my Jesus journey. I struggled for years in spiritual immaturity because I believed in a false definition of faith. I thought faith required me to accept as an act of my will that the Bible was true. I tried to pursue God without being convinced He was real. This didn’t go well. It wasn’t until I realized the true Biblical understanding of faith that my life began to be deeply transformed. If a person is never fully convinced in their own mind that Christianity is true, they will never go very far with God.
- I. Get your questions answered, and search for satisfying answers no matter what the cost. Wrestle with and respond to your doubts. Investigate. Learn. Research. Study. The time and effort you spend on convincing yourself that Christianity is true will not be wasted. The health of your soul and your spiritual life depend on it. Don’t ignore or dismiss your questions about God.

III. Lessons on Faith (Heb. 11:6)

- A. The theme of faith begins with an explanation of what faith is and moves to the spiritual lessons the author of Hebrews wants disciples in the church to understand about a life of trust in God. In the middle of describing how faith influenced people in the past, the author of Hebrews gives

⁴ This does not “put God in a box” in the sense of inappropriately limiting God. Logic, reason, and wisdom are a feature of God Himself, and it is the way God encourages us to interact with Him (Jn. 1:1-2, Pr. 8:12-23, Mt. 22:37, Isa. 41:21, 43:26). For more on this see chapter one, “The Intellectual Pursuit of God” in Travis Dickinson, [*Logic and the Way of Jesus: Thinking Critically and Christianly*](#) (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2022).

⁵ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Hebrews 11:1, 3 “faith”

us a lesson on faith in verse six. As we're going to see, faith creates a two-perspective focus that simultaneously looks upward toward God and outward toward the future God will provide.⁶

- B. The first and more important lesson we need to learn about our attitude of trust toward God is:
 - ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for the one who comes to God must believe that He exists, and *that* He proves to be One who rewards those who seek Him. (Heb. 11:6)
- C. For the author of Hebrews, an attitude of trust in God (faith) is how people are accepted and approved by God ("by it the people of old gained approval", v. 1 and "without faith it is impossible to please Him", v. 6). A person's fundamental disposition and posture toward God is the most critical factor in a person's relationship with God.⁷ If a person's attitude toward God is not right, their relationship with and connection to God is not right. Unless a person's fundamental attitude toward God changes from doubt and skepticism to confidence and trust, they will never be able to live the kind of life that God desires and requires. A person's attitude toward God is the most important characteristic of who they are. When our attitude toward God is healthy, the floodgates of God's blessings open to us. When our attitude toward God is unhealthy, we are hostile toward God.
- D. In the second part of the verse, the mental and intellectual elements of faith are explained.⁸ Faith is not anti-intellectual; it has specific propositional content. Faith is an attitude that is directed toward specific objects. Faith is not some abstract, unattached quality—it is tied to specific realities. Faith stands in relationship to particular features of God. Faith is only as reliable as the object toward which it is directed. A person can have faith that a chair will hold them up, but that faith is only as good as the quality and construction of the chair. It is possible for a person to put their faith in the wrong object. Faith can be reliably placed or irresponsibly placed. The basic features of faith in God are: 1) being convinced that God really exists ("must believe that He exists", v. 6) and 2) being confident that pursuing God is worthwhile ("who rewards those who seek Him", v. 6). These two convictions are the basics of Biblical faith.
- E. A person who gives some allegiance to God with the hope that they can appease God and not get themselves into trouble without being convinced the God of the Bible exists as a real person is not a person who has genuine faith. Plenty of people pray to a God they don't believe in, hoping it will work, but not expecting it to. Those with a real and authentic faith are convinced God is a real person that exists who interacts with us and plays an important role in our lives.
- F. A person who neglects learning about God and putting what God says into practice in their lives but still attends church regularly is not a person with genuine faith. Those with a real and authentic faith are confident that God is a good person who does good for those whose hearts are set on Him. They understand that it is always beneficial for them to do what God wants. Any sacrifices of time, effort, or inconvenience are small prices to pay to receive the benefits

⁶ Douglas J. Moo, [Hebrews](#), ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 409.

⁷ Douglas J. Moo, [Hebrews](#), ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 414.

⁸ Douglas J. Moo, [Hebrews](#), ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 414.

that God will give them in return. Individuals with Biblical faith invest in their pursuit of God because they know God will provide good blessings as a result.

- G. Without these two basic intellectual features of faith, a person will not be able to move forward in their Christian life with God. This foundation must be laid first to be able to build on it. While it is possible to do the “right” activities and go through the motions without these basics of Biblical faith, that person will not spiritually progress forward toward God. There is a big difference between people with Biblical faith and those without Biblical faith. Personally developing these two basic convictions is the place where every person needs to start their Jesus journey. We need to be convinced that the God of the Bible exists and that drawing near to Him is beneficial and worthwhile. Without this foundation, we can’t get anywhere with God.
- H. The first lesson on faith is that it is required to please God. The second lesson of faith is that faith trusts God, even without receiving all God’s promises in this life (Heb. 11:13, 39-40):
 - ³⁹ And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect. (Heb. 11:39-40)
- I. Faith waits patiently on God to fulfill His promises. An attitude and perspective of trust in God realizes that the rewards and promises of God are not fully experienced in this life. The point about faith is a bit stronger than that. Even though all these people were approved by God, none of them received what was promised during their lifetime (“And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised”, v. 39). If disciples expect to fully enjoy all the benefits of Jesus in this life, we will be disappointed. Everyone who lives with faith must wait until eternity to receive what God promised. While people on this list of faith did receive some of the promises in their lifetime, they had to wait for the ultimate and full expression of God’s promise of salvation.
- J. The full expression of the blessings of God will be experienced by all those with faith at the same time (“so that apart from us they would not be made perfect”, v. 40). Old Testament people with faith in God will be joined to New Testament disciples so that both groups will receive the full blessings and promises of God at the same time at the consummation of all things when they inherit the kingdom of God at the end of time. All those with faith will participate in the marriage supper of the Lamb.
- K. Those with faith in God in the Old Testament will join those with faith in Jesus and all will receive the promise of the ultimate fulfillment of the kingdom of God—sin-free perfect harmony in the presence of God. Everyone with genuine faith in Jesus will arrive at the goal of God’s saving purposes together.⁹ That final goal in the process of salvation is everyone being brought to their completion in Jesus as they receive the final and full forgiveness of sins.¹⁰ Everyone who belongs to God will pass safely through the judgment, punishment, and removal of everyone whose sins have not been forgiven.

⁹ J. Harold Greenlee, [*An Exegetical Summary of Hebrews*](#), 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 482.

¹⁰ Douglas J. Moo, [*Hebrews*](#), ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 459.

- L. Faith can accomplish some amazing success stories in our lives (Heb. 11:32-35). It can also lead to great suffering on behalf of Jesus (Heb. 11:36-38). Whether our faith conquers all or is needed to endure persecution, it is the characteristic of faith that carries us through. In either case, faith is a powerful force in our lives that can accomplish much.
- M. Faith empowered the building of a massive boat to preserve humanity. Faith conquered kingdoms, shut the mouths of lions, stopped the destructive power of fire, made people strong, allowed the endurance of torture, etc. Faith in God is powerful, and it can produce mind stretching possibilities at times. Throughout history, those with a strong trust in God performed amazing feats. If we develop and live by a strong faith in Jesus, we may be amazed at what God does with it. God may do things with you that you never thought were possible. God may take you to places you never thought you would go, and yet the journey will be much richer than you ever imagined.

IV. The Desired Response (Heb. 12:1-3)

- A. What difference does faith make? Does our trust in God change anything? Is faith practically valuable? Too many people think developing a stronger trust in Jesus is not relevant to healthy and prosperous living—that it won't have a significant beneficial impact on their life. Other pursuits seem more important to our health and quality of life. But is this true?
- B. A few critical practical benefits of faith are offered in the application portion of the theme of faith:
 - ¹ Therefore, since we also have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let's rid ourselves of every obstacle and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let's run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking only at Jesus, the originator and perfecter of the faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Heb. 12:1-3)
- C. We have now arrived at the implementation phase of faith ("Therefore", v. 1). Since we, as New Covenant disciples, have all these Old Testament examples of faith through whom the Holy Spirit continues to speak to us, we fight against and rid ourselves of sin ("let's rid ourselves of every obstacle and the sin which so easily entangles us", v. 1). Notice how sin works in our lives. It can easily entangle us. Any sin we find ourselves wrapped up in, we need to get ourselves out of and stay away from using the strength and resources God provides. Disciples should develop the habit of repenting early and often. The longer we allow sin to impact us and our lives, usually, the more difficult it becomes to dislodge. Habits are difficult to change; sinful habits are even more challenging.
- D. As disciples, we need to do more than get rid of sin from our lives. We also need to toss out any obstacle that gets in our way of living a life of faith—anything that interferes with or delays our action or progress with Jesus, or something that weighs us down spiritually ("rid ourselves of every obstacle", v. 1).¹¹ These obstacles could be morally neutral on their own—they may not

¹¹ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Hebrews 12:1 "obstacle"

be wrong in themselves.¹² However, these obstacles may have a negative spiritual impact on us. They are excessive weight that is slowing us down. For example, scrolling through social media may not be wrong in itself, but if it prevents us from spending time reading God's word, it becomes a spiritual obstacle. Any obstacle that gets us off track or slows us down with God also needs to be dealt with so we can be spiritually healthy.

- E. Like Jesus, God promises us an indestructible and enduring eternal joy that should motivate our current suffering and any sacrifice we make for God ("for the joy set before Him endured the cross", v. 2). Jesus, as our example for the Christian life, shows us how to suffer while on earth for the eternal joy of God. We can be encouraged by Jesus' example. It is the path of the Christian life to suffer in this world for the sake of pursuing God and resisting sin in virtue of God's promise of future joy. Jesus' example helps us establish accurate expectations. The Christian life isn't always smooth, and it won't always be happy.
- F. Knowing the Christian life and living by faith is to make sacrifices for God and struggle against sin, we can be encouraged when our lives become difficult and our struggle to seek God is burdensome ("so that you will not grow weary and lost heart", v. 3). Even though the Christian life can be difficult, disciples shouldn't become physically, mentally, or emotionally drained.¹³ We need to learn how to live in a way that is good for our overall health, having healthy rhythms of life that nourish our soul. We can't overdo life with excessive activity to the point we become exhausted from physical activity.¹⁴

V. Conclusion

- A. An attitude of trust in God and His word is a critical element of a healthy lifestyle. It is needed to please God. When we become fully convinced Christianity is true, we will pursue God in a more robust way that will not be possible without this realization. Faith understands the benefits of doing life God's way.
- B. While many examples of people living life with strong confidence in God exist, Jesus is the best example. Through Jesus' example, we learn that obeying God comes at a cost, and life is not always easy. Instead of discouraging us, knowing the Christian life is a battle will empower us to have a determined mindset that moves us toward the future joy God will make available.

¹² J. Harold Greenlee, [An Exegetical Summary of Hebrews](#), 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 484.

¹³ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Hebrews 12:3 "you will not grow weary"

¹⁴ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Hebrews 12:3 "lose heart"