

North Summit Church
Hebrews 11:1-16
The Life of the Faithful
February 22, 2026

We're continuing our journey through *Hebrews: Encountering the Supremacy of Christ*.

- **Last week:** We heard the fourth warning: don't shrink back. The righteous shall live by faith. And we declared together: **We are not of those who shrink back.**
- Today we arrive at one of the most beloved sections of the entire Bible. Chapter 11 of Hebrews. The Hall of Faith.

But I want us to resist the urge to treat this chapter like a collection of inspiring stories. Because the author doesn't just mean it as a highlight reel of spiritual heroes. He means it as proof. Evidence. The lived testimony of what it looks like when ordinary people trust in the faithfulness of an extraordinary God.

Faith is not a concept to master. It's a life to live.

Introduction: The Righteous Shall Live by Faith

- At the end of last week's passage, the author left us with this quote from the prophet Habakkuk. It's the hinge on which everything in chapter 11 swings:

Hebrews 10:38-39

"But my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls."

- And then almost without pausing for breath, he turns the page and says:
 - **"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for..."**
- He's not changing the subject. He's explaining the subject. He's about to show them what "living by faith" actually looks like in a real human life.
- But first he has to define the thing.
- This is just as important for us today as it was for these first century Jewish Christians...the word "faith" in our culture has been emptied of almost all of its original meaning.
- When we say faith, we usually mean something like: **I believe certain things are true.** I assent to a set of theological propositions. I can affirm the right doctrines.

- But here's the problem with that. James has something important to say about that kind of faith:

James 2:19

"You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!"

- **Intellectual agreement isn't what saves you.** The demons have excellent theology. They believe in the existence of God, in the reality of judgment, in the authority of Christ. And it does them absolutely no good.
- The author of Hebrews is driving at something far deeper. And to really understand it, we need to go back to Habakkuk — back to the Hebrew word behind our English translation.

Emunah

- When Habakkuk wrote "the righteous shall live by **faith**," the Hebrew word he used was **emunah** (אֱמוּנָה).
- Emunah comes from the root **aman** — the same root as the word Amen. And that root means:
 - To be firm, established, and unwavering
 - To be steadfast under pressure
 - To be reliably, actively loyal over time
- Emunah isn't addressing specifically what's in your head. It's about who you are in the way you live. A better translation might be: **loyal steadfastness** or **faithful trust in God's character**.
- The contrast the author set up at the end of chapter 10 wasn't belief vs. doubt. It was **loyal endurance** vs. **abandonment**. Emunah vs. shrinking back.
- Which makes everything that follows in chapter 11 make perfect sense.

He's not giving us a list of great theological thinkers. He's giving us a list of people who **kept walking in the same direction** — trusting that God was faithful — even when they couldn't see the outcome.

1. Defining the Life of Faith | Hebrews 11:1-3

Hebrews 11:1-3

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible."

- Two words in verse one deserve our attention.
- **"Assurance"**
 - The Greek word translated *assurance* is **hypostasis**. It literally means: that which stands under something. The foundation. The substance. The solid ground beneath your feet.
 - This is the same word the author used back in chapter 1 to describe Christ as the **"exact imprint of God's nature."** It carries weight. Solidity. Reality.
 - And it's the closest Greek equivalent to the Hebrew **emunah**. Faith isn't a feeling. It isn't even primarily a conviction. It's a **foundation** — something you build your life on and stand on when the ground around you is shaking.
- **"Conviction" — Elenchos**
 - The second word, *conviction*, is **elenchos**. It means evidence. Proof. The kind of certainty a lawyer presents in a courtroom. Not wishful thinking — **settled certainty** about things that can't be seen with the naked eye.
- **So put it together:** Faith is the solid foundation that comes from being certain about what God has promised, even though you can't fully see it yet.
- And verse 3 grounds it immediately in the most fundamental reality: **God spoke and creation came into being.** The physical world we can see came from an unseen spiritual reality: **the word of God.**
 - The pattern is established from the very beginning. God speaks. God is faithful. What he says comes to pass.

Faith is a settled confidence that what God says is more real than what our eyes can see.

2. Faith as a Lived Reality | Hebrews 11:4-12

Now the author begins his witness list. And each example isn't random, each one is chosen to demonstrate a specific dimension of what this lived faith looks like.

- These are given to show us that faith has a shape, it has a form, it actually looks like something.

***Abel — Faith That Costs Something | v. 4**

Hebrews 11:4

"By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks."

- Abel is first in the list, and he's also the first martyr in all of Scripture. His faith cost him his life.
- The comparison between Abel and Cain isn't primarily about sacrifice technique. The Genesis account reveals that Cain's heart wasn't right before God. Abel brought his offering in faith...with genuine trust in God's character and in what God had said. Cain did not.
- The point the author is making: **faithful trust in God will sometimes cost you.** Abel's emunah didn't protect him from suffering, rather it put him directly in the path of it. And yet, the author says, *"though he died, he still speaks."* Faithful obedience to God echoes beyond the grave. It outlasts the cost.
- There are people in this room who know that following Christ has cost them something real. A relationship. A career path. Reputation. Comfort. And the temptation is to look at that cost and wonder if it was worth it.
- Abel's testimony from across the centuries says: **what you entrust to God is never wasted.** Your faithful obedience still speaks.

*Enoch — Faith That Walks | v. 5-6

Hebrews 11:5-6

"By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."

- Enoch's story in Genesis is super brief: ***"Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him."***
 - Genesis gives us eight generations of "and he died" — and then in the middle of all that death, Enoch. Who didn't.
- The author's commentary is verse 6: **without faith it is impossible to please God.** Not difficult. Not unlikely. Impossible.
 - Not just believing God exists as an abstract fact — but believing that **God is good and actively engaged** in the lives of those who seek him. That he sees. That he cares. That he rewards our faithfulness.
- Enoch's faith was a daily walk. Not a dramatic moment. Not a single decision. A lifetime of orienting himself toward God, day by day, trusting that God was real and that it mattered. And the result was a life so saturated with the presence of God that even death stepped aside.

*Noah — Faith That Builds in the Dark | v. 7

Hebrews 11:7

"By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith."

- Noah was told to prepare for something no one had ever seen. There was no precedent. No prior experience to reference. No reason from a purely rational standpoint to believe it. Just the word of God, and Noah obeyed.
- The author says he acted in **reverent fear**. This is important. His fear of God was greater than his fear of what people thought of him. He was willing to look foolish, to be out of step with the entire world around him, because he trusted that what God said was true.
- And here's what the author wants us to see: **Noah's faithful obedience didn't just save his family — it condemned the world around him.** Not in a self-righteous way.
 - **But in this sense:** his life was a living testimony that it was possible to trust God. And the world refused.
- There is a moment in every believer's life where you have to build your ark. Where you have to act on what God has said, even when the people around you think you're crazy. Even when you can't see the rain clouds yet. Even when culture looks at your life and doesn't understand it.
- **Faith that only goes as far as what makes sense to others isn't emunah.**

*Abraham and Sarah — Faith That Leaves and Receives | v. 8-12

Hebrews 11:8-10

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."

Hebrews 11:11-12

"By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore."

- Abraham is the centerpiece of this entire section, the author spends more time here than on anyone else. And for good reason.

Three things stand out in Abraham's faith:

- **He left without a destination.** "He went out, not knowing where he was going." There was no map. No Google Maps. He simply trusted God's direction and started walking.
- **He lived as a stranger.** He never fully possessed what God promised. He lived in tents his entire life in the land he was told his descendants would inherit. And yet he never gave up. He was still moving toward the promise.
- **He was looking for something beyond the physical.** Verse 10 is important: he was looking for *"the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."* Abraham understood — at some level — that what God was promising went far beyond a piece of real estate in Canaan.
- **And then Sarah.** The author makes a point of including her, and his emphasis is on this: she considered God faithful.
 - Even though every biological indicator said otherwise.
 - Even though her own body declared the promise impossible.
 - She anchored herself in the character of God, not the circumstance.
- The result? From two people as good as dead, God produced descendants as numerous as the stars.

When God's faithfulness becomes your foundation, the impossible become reality.

[Personal Testimony]

- This week marked the 18th anniversary of my mom's passing. She died in 2008 — on the eve of her own birthday. And this year, and this week, the reality of that loss hit me with a little more weight than normal. And as I was processing it I think it is because my oldest daughter is about to graduate. And when we experience loss it is milestones like this that we celebrate with such profound joy, but they also come along with the grief of that loss at the same time, because every milestone like this is a reminder of how much life I wish my mom could have been here for.
- In 2008, the same year she died, my daughter was born. The same year I buried my mother, I held my daughter for the first time.
 - Death and life, loss and gift, grief and gratitude, all wrapped up together.
- And in the middle of that, there was a moment — more than one moment — where faith felt more like gripping a rope in the dark than standing on solid

ground. Where you're trusting not because you can see the outcome, but because you know the character of the God who holds the rope.

- What I've learned in the years since — and what I see in every one of these examples in Hebrews 11 — is that **God is faithful to redeem what this sin-cursed world throws at us**. Not by erasing the grief. Not by pretending the loss isn't real. But by weaving it into something we couldn't have imagined on our own.
- My daughter is about to step into this next season of her life, and in some mysterious way, for me, is a testimony to the faithfulness of God, and a living reminder of the woman who shaped me into the man who is her father.
- The question is whether or not we are going to lean into our faith in Christ, and live in the reality of what He is doing in the big picture. Or are we going to let our circumstances rob us of what Christ wants to do in us, as He works in us.
- This is where we experience the lived reality of our salvation. As we allow God to redeem the brokenness all around us in beautiful ways and He uses every ounce of it to form us into the image of His Son. If we will simply receive it by faith.

Paul puts it this way:

Romans 8:28

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

- That's not a promise that everything will be easy. It's not a promise that the grief won't be real. It's a promise that **God is not finished**. That in his hands, nothing is wasted. That his faithfulness reaches into the darkest corners of our lives and refuses to leave them unredeemed. But we have to allow Him to do His redeeming work, and that only comes through living in light of His faithfulness.
- Abraham lived in tents his whole life, never fully seeing what God promised. But the author tells us he kept looking. He stayed oriented toward the city whose builder is God.
- That's what faith looks like in the dark. Not certainty about the outcome. Certainty about the One who holds the outcome.

3. The Deeper Reality They Were Living Toward | Hebrews 11:13-16

Hebrews 11:13-16

"These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that

they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city."

- Here the author pulls back and shows us what's been underneath all of these stories.
- These men and women — Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah — they all died without fully receiving what was promised. Not a single one of them saw the complete fulfillment.
- Yet the author says: **they saw it from afar**. They greeted the promises from a distance. Like a traveler on the ridge of a mountain who can see the city on the horizon — they couldn't get there yet, but they knew it was real. And that vision was enough to keep them moving.

They Knew They Were Exiles

- Verse 13 says they acknowledged they were **"strangers and exiles on the earth."** This wasn't despair — it was right orientation. They understood that this world, in its current broken condition, was not the final destination. They weren't building a permanent home in a country that was passing away.
- And verse 15 is important: **they could have gone back**. If they had wanted to return to what they left — to the familiar, the comfortable, the known — there was nothing stopping them.
- That's the same situation we talked about last week. The Jewish believers being tempted to return to the old covenant. And also, every one of us who has ever been tempted to drift back toward the life we had before Christ.
- But they didn't go back. Because **"they desired a better country — that is, a heavenly one."** They kept their eyes fixed on what God had promised rather than what they had left behind.

The Country They Were Looking For

- Now — I don't want us to hear this as an escape hatch. As if the life of faith is just enduring this world until we get to float away to some ethereal spiritual realm.
- **The biblical vision is far grander than that.**
- These faithful men and women were looking for a **city whose designer and builder is God**. They were looking for the restoration of all things — not the

destruction of creation, but its complete renewal under the reign of God. A world finally set right. A creation fully submitted to the Lordship of its King.

- And here's what we know that they didn't: **we know who that King is.** We have seen the fulfillment they were straining to see from afar. We have received the one who is the true and better homeland. Jesus Christ — the one who said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*" The one in whom the city of God has come to us. The one who has already been crowned Lord of all creation and who is coming back to make all things new.

Revelation 21:1-3

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.'"

- This is the city they were looking for. God dwelling with his people. Creation restored. The communion that was lost in the garden, now permanent and complete.
- We now live in light of that reality. That is what God is currently building, and will one day bring to completion.
- And the author's point should be encouraging to us: **if they could live by faith toward a promise they could only see from the distant horizon, how much more can we?**
 - We have seen the fulfillment. We have received the Spirit. We have the complete revelation of God in Jesus Christ. We sit on this side of the resurrection.

Those who saw the promise from afar stayed faithful. We who have seen the fulfillment — how much more should we live in it?

- **And let's not miss the last line of this section.**
 - Verse 16 says: **"God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city."**
- God is not ashamed to identify himself with these faithful, imperfect, sometimes-stumbling men and women. He doesn't say "*the God of those who had it together.*" He says **the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.** He attached his name to ordinary people who simply kept trusting him.

- And he is not ashamed to be called your God, either. In all of your weakness, in all of your uncertainty, in all of the seasons where faith looked less like standing on solid ground and more like gripping a rope in the dark — he is not ashamed of you.
- **He has prepared a city for you. And it's coming.**

Conclusion: The Life of the Faithful

- The author of Hebrews opened chapter 10 with a warning: don't shrink back. The righteous shall live by faith.
- And now he unpacks what that life looks like. It's not the life of someone who has everything figured out. It's the life of someone who has decided that God's faithfulness is more reliable than their own sight.

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- And the best picture of what that looks like is the very prophet the author quoted to open all of this up.
 - Let's go back to Habakkuk for a moment. When he wrote **“the righteous shall live by emunah,”** he wasn't writing from a place of comfort. He was watching Babylon rise. He was watching violence go unanswered and injustice go unpunished. He was watching the world descend into chaos and crying out to a God who, from where he stood, seemed silent.

And then, right before God gives him that word about the righteous living by faith, Habakkuk does something that I think is the posture of every person in Hebrews 11. He says this:

Habakkuk 2:1

“I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.”

- I will take my stand. I will station myself. I will look out to see what God will say.
- That is not the posture of someone who has the answers. That's the posture of someone who has decided that God does. Habakkuk doesn't understand what God is doing. He can't see the outcome. But he climbs up to the watchtower anyway and waits. He positions himself to receive whatever God says next. He trusts that God will speak, and that what he says will be worth waiting for.

Paul captures the same posture in a single sentence:

2 Corinthians 5:7

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”

- Not by sight. Not by outcome. Not by whether the circumstances confirm that God is at work. By faith — by emunah — by the settled, steadfast trust in the God who has proven himself faithful across the whole sweep of human history, and who is not going to stop now.
- Those who saw only the distant edge of the promise took their stand at the watchtower and waited on God. We who have seen the fulfillment in Jesus Christ — how much more can we do the same?

Because...we are not of those who shrink back. We are of those who live by faith!

[Closing Prayer]

Small Group Discussion Questions

1. The Definition of Faith

The sermon drew a distinction between intellectual belief ("even the demons believe") and emunah — the Hebrew concept of loyal steadfastness, faithful trust in God's character, held firm over time. This is the kind of faith that shapes how you actually live, not just what you agree to.

What is the difference between knowing things about God and trusting God's character? Where in my life right now am I being invited to move from intellectual agreement to lived emunah — and what would that actually look like this week?

2. Living in the Dark

Each example in Hebrews 11:1-12 involves someone who acted on God's word before they could see the outcome — Abel before vindication, Noah before the rain, Abraham before the land, Sarah before the child. The author chose these examples precisely because they trusted God's faithfulness with no visible guarantee.

Where in my life right now am I waiting for something God has promised, but can't yet see? How does the example of these faithful men and women encourage or challenge my own posture of waiting?

3. Strangers and Exiles

The author says these faithful people acknowledged they were "strangers and exiles on the earth" — and that they could have returned to what they left, but didn't, because

they desired a better country. The temptation to look back toward the familiar — old habits, old identities, old ways of life — is real for every believer.

What am I most tempted to look back at when following Christ feels costly? What does it look like practically for me to "desire a better country" rather than returning to what I've left behind?

4. God Is Not Ashamed

The passage ends with a stunning statement: "God is not ashamed to be called their God." He attached his name to imperfect, sometimes-stumbling people who simply kept trusting him. The author wants us to receive that same assurance — that God is not ashamed to be called our God, either.

How does it change the way I approach God to know that he is not ashamed to be identified with me in my weakness and failure? Is there an area where I've been hiding from God when I should be running to him? What would it look like to run to my great High Priest this week instead of away from him?