

“Commendable Faith (Part 5)”

The examples given of commendable faith in Hebrews 11 encourage us to believe and walk by faith. Following Jesus is not always easy, though. So, in Hebrews 12:1-3 the author of Hebrews writes this word of encouragement: “*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,* ² *looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was 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 endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.*” There are three truths in these verses that will help us have the kind of commendable faith we see demonstrated in Hebrews 11.

First, those with commendable faith are *inspired by those who have gone before us*. We will be inspired and blessed when we remember that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, such as by those included in the long list of those who were found faithful in Hebrews 11. It was not easy for Noah to build the ark and preach righteousness for 120 years, while no one listened to his words of warning. But he *kept on keeping on* – and we can, too. Abraham’s testimony should inspire us to listen carefully to what God tells us to do, and follow where He leads, and be true to His will. Joseph experienced both the best of times and the worst of times – yet, through it all he remained true and faithful to God. What an encouragement that it is to us, to not only faithfully run the Christian race when things are going our way – but to also cling to Jesus when everything seems to be falling apart. People whom we have crossed paths with (whether living or deceased) also encourage us by their life and example. I pray that we will feel their hand on our shoulder encouraging us to not give up, or lose heart, or quit.

Secondly, those with commendable faith are *prepared for the struggles that will come*. In order to become better suited for the difficulties that lie ahead the author of Hebrews exhorts us to “*...lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily entangles us.*” This is the time to eliminate every possible hindrance that may be slowing us down in our Christian life. This is certainly a reminder to get rid of sin, and not to mess around with it, or take it lightly. But it’s also a call to even cast-off things which may not be “sinful,” but things that are making our walk of obedient faithfulness more difficult. We take these measures so that we may “*...run with endurance the race that is set before us.*” It’s a long haul from here to eternity, so not only do we want to *start* with great promise – but we also want to *finish* the race. Stay faithful during the good times and the bad. Keep believing, even if your physical eyes don’t *yet* see the results you’re looking for. Keep doing the *first* and *basic* things, even as we grow and mature in our walk with the Lord. Stay in the Word and be prayerful – always keep the lines of communication open with the Lord. No matter what happens, determine that you are continuing on with Jesus in the race that is marked out for you.

Third, those with commendable faith should *fix their eyes on Jesus*. Fasten the eyes of your spirit upon Him. Focus your attention on Jesus. Since we can’t look at Jesus with our physical

eyes, we need to “see Him” in the Words of Scripture. Meditate on His majesty when you pray to Him and worship. Someone said, “*If you want to be distressed, look within; if you want to be defeated, look back; if you want to be distracted, look around; if you want to be dismayed, try to look ahead into the future – but if you want to be delivered, look unto Jesus!* I think this story bears that out. *One time three boys were outside playing on the snow-covered ground. Their older cousin came along and said to them, “Would you like to try a race where the winner will receive a prize?” The boys agreed, and their cousin told them that his race was to be different. “I will go to the other side of the field,” he said, “and when I give you the signal you will start to run. The one whose footsteps are the straightest in the snow will be the winner.” The race commenced, and the first boy kept looking at his feet to see if his steps were straight. The second boy kept looking at his companions to see what they were doing; but the third boy just ran on with his eyes steadfastly fixed on his cousin on the other side of the field. The third boy was the winner, for his footsteps were straight in the snow. He had kept his eyes on the goal ahead of him. In the same way, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, so our path will be straight, and so that we will arrive at our eternal destination!*

Discussion Guide/Action Steps

1. Who are your favorite characters in the Bible? How can their testimonies encourage you?
2. Think of people in your life who have been influential (whether living or deceased). What are some lessons that you learned from their example?
3. What “non-sinful” things is God speaking to you about to lay aside (because they’re distracting you from following Christ with deeper devotion)?
4. What are the sins that often entangle you? How can you see victory and deliverance finally come from these sins that have been ensnaring and plaguing your life for too long?
5. What are some characteristics of Jesus that you need to focus on? Think about His words and works. What are the things that Jesus *did*? What are the things that Jesus *said*?