

## Devotional for Hebrews 11:17-40

Hebrews 11 is God's tribute to men and women who, though their lives weren't perfect, fought the good fight of the faith, and held onto their confidence in God to the end --- holding on till the end being the qualification for belonging to the house of Christ, according to Hebrews 3:6. These are people who when they died heard God say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

God put this chapter in His book to encourage us to do likewise. We know that was his purpose because immediately in Hebrews 12 these people are called the "cloud of witnesses" who offer proof that we can "lay aside every weight and sin that ensnares us, and run with endurance the race set before us." We know it also because Paul tells us elsewhere to "Be imitators of me." Imitation of faith-full people is a good thing.

Now is our time, our century, to run this race. And we take up the journey knowing that we too are able --- well able --- to be overcomers of "every weight and sin that ensnares us," every personal place of bondage and stronghold. If we say that we are not able to do this, if we keep calling ourselves depraved sinners, and make excuses for sloppy obedience, this is not modesty but it is to trample Christ underfoot, according to Hebrews 10:29. For those who believe in Christ must believe that his blood is not only good for forgiveness but good for transformation.

Each of us is in a contest every day. The contest is between the new nature and the old nature, which wants to reassert itself (See Galatians 5:17). There are different voices in our heads all the time vying for control, even when you're driving down the road alone --- nattering voices of defeatism, fear, fatalism, resentment, envy, self-condemnation, inferiority, and lies that we may have been believing for decades:

"You've blown it." "You're a failure." "Too late." "You're unloved." "You've ruined everything." "There's no hope." "Because of your past, you'll have to settle for the way things are." "Nothing good or surprising will ever happen in your life again."

Faith is the voice of the Spirit that talks back to those voices and says (I like to speak it out loud) "Get thee behind me, Satan. I am a saved child of the King. I believe that I will yet see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!"

Notice the striking common denominator in the faith of these people in Hebrews 11 ---muscularity. Their faith is not limp, or passive, or a theoretical Sunday-morning-voter-registration-card faith. It is not vague, not drowsy. It does not roll over to depression. Does not let defeat or self-condemnation have the last word. Does not let bitterness or a vague malaise simmer on the back burner for ages, but is a search-and-destroy-ungodly-thinking kind of faith, as 2 Corinthians 13:5 tells us to do. It talks back to the fleshly reasoning and says: "No! I rebuke that thought in the name of Jesus! That's not me anymore, that's the flesh, and I am a new creation!" As 2 Corinthians 10:4,5 says, this faith "takes captive" all thoughts and "demolishes all arguments" that oppose God.

Notice that the faith of these people is not something vague and contentless. Believing God is always believing something particular that he has said. People with Hebrews 11 faith are people who have learned, by much practice, the art of *thinking things through* --- of rightly dividing and then applying the word of God to the matter of the moment.

That's why we cannot really walk effectively in faith unless we are often in God's Word and we know what he says --- what it is he loves and what it is he hates; what he commands and what promises he attaches to doing certain things. When we make the reading of God's word a part of our life, *His* voice increases, and the other voices decrease. We more easily identify the demonic voices (See James 3:15) and discern them from the voice of Jesus (See John 10:27). It is only when the words of God are more real to us than anything else that we will obey it.

I asked a woman in this church how she was able to get over a particularly painful situation in her life. She answered: "It all comes down to faith." It was profound. At every given moment, we are going to act according to what we are believing. If we believe that we can get away with a deliberately hurtful or sarcastic word, and that there will be no spiritual consequences, we will do that. It will be the default, because the pressure to do it is intense at that moment. But if we are "conscious of God" (as 1 Peter 2:19 says) in that moment, we will put to death the fleshly impulse.

2 Chronicles 16:9 says, “The eyes of the Lord range to and fro throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.” God is like the miner panning for gold, looking closely into the pan to find flecks of gold. This gold is our faith, the things we do in the course of a day for no other reason than because we believe him.

Each of the people named in Hebrews 11 at some point did some things --- and refrained from doing other things --- simply because they believed “that God is, and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). They put his words above any other so-called “facts.”

- Sarah: “It doesn’t matter that I’m old: God says I will have a baby, so I’m believing it.”
- Abraham: “God told me Isaac will be my heir and give me children numerous as the stars. So if God want me to offer him up, He must be planning to make him come alive afterward.”
- Moses: “If I stay in the palace, I will have luxury for maybe 80 years, and then I die, it’s over. If I give up the palace, I suffer with the Jews for maybe 80 years, but then I have eternity with God.
- Rahab: “If I help the spies I could get killed. But I am convinced that the God of Israel is going to win, so I’m going with them.”
- Gideon: “I have only 300 soldiers to the enemy’s 100,000. But God is telling me our side will win. I’m going out with my 300.”
- Samson: “Get behind me, voices that are telling me it’s too late for me, and who say, ‘You have blown it beyond redemption.’ Father, I believe that even now, even after my lifetime of poor choices, you are willing to forgive me, and you are able to do something beyond all I think or imagine in the last hour of my life.”

Whatever we are believing about God right now, let’s try believing a little bit higher. Let’s use our sanctified imagination to imagine what God can do with our situations.

God loved that quality in these men and woman in Hebrews 11, and so he inscribed their names in this chapter in honor of them. Like godly Abel, they still speak. They urge us to believe God to the maximum in these short lives of the testing of the genuineness of our faith, before we all go home to be with him.