

A Living Faith

Heb. 11:1-3

Series “More”

Jarrett Stephens

We begin a new series today that I am really excited about. As you just saw in the bumper video, we are calling it *MORE: A Living Faith*, and I am taking that as my title today.

The Lord has been taking me on a personal journey lately and this idea of “MORE” has just begun to be the cry of my heart. I don’t know where it started...when it started...it just seems to have been increasingly gradual in my life – just this desire for MORE.

It’s where I am and it’s what I want to call our church to:

- I want MORE of God’s presence in my life...
- I want to know him MORE intimately and spend MORE time with him in prayer and in his Word...
- I want him to use me MORE to be a blessing to others and for him to get MORE glory from my life in the decisions and choices I make...
- I just want MORE of him...

And this is what I want for our church! That we would be a people that longs for MORE of God...

- That we would not settle for going through the motions...
- That we would refuse to participate in empty religious activity that is void of the spirit of God...
- That we would not be satisfied with where we are...

But instead, I’m praying that we would collectively believe and ask God, like we talked about last week and in the Summit leadership training to give us a “whatever it takes” mindset to reach one MORE for Christ and work like crazy to make it happen.

“God, give us MORE. Trust us with MORE...help us accomplish MORE for your Kingdom...use us to push back MORE darkness than ever.”

This is where I am, Champion Forest, and this is what I want for us. And this is what has led me to begin this Fall preaching series.

We’re going to spend the next 13 weeks (with a couple of breaks here and there) in Hebrews 11.

When I think of people that experienced MORE of God in their life from a biblical perspective, MANY of them are listed by name in Hebrews chapter 11. It’s been referred to as the Hall of FAITH – and that’s what people who experienced MORE from God ALL had in common – they had a living faith!

We'll see and study in this series people like Noah and Abraham and Moses and learn how they lived by faith. We'll talk about some lesser-known people who lived by faith - people like Abel (that's next week) and Enoch and Rahab. We're going to look at some no-named people who are recognized for their faith.

And ALL of these individuals...the heavy-weights, the lesser-known people, those that we are not provided their names they are highlighted because of their faith, and as a result they experienced MORE in their life.

I read this quote by **Jim Cymbala** of the Brooklyn Tabernacle last week and I want to read it again right now. It's from his book, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, and it encapsulates how I am feeling and what I am longing for on behalf of our church.

He writes: **"I despaired at the thought that my life might slip by without seeing God show himself mightily on our behalf."**

This series is all about preparing our hearts for MORE. And those that experienced MORE in the Bible – they all had a living faith.

And so, here is what I want to do as we begin this series. I first want us to define faith – what is it? Then, I want us to describe faith:

- What does it look like to have faith?
- What does faith do?
- Why is faith so important?

And then, we'll close the message out by giving what I'm calling some "Declarations of Faith" that I am hoping and praying will set the tone for this entire series as we make our way through this great chapter in the Bible.

Let's get after it, and let's begin reading:

Heb. 11:1-3 – "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the people of old received their commendation. ³ By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible."

Let's begin by first: **Defining Faith**

Now, the word "faith" is found 32x in the book of Hebrews – and 24 of those 32x, here in chapter eleven. It's an important word, NOT just to the book of Hebrews, but to the whole Bible.

Now, what is faith? (v. 1) was NEVER meant to be a full or complete definition of faith, but it does give us some insight into what it is. Let's read it again.

Heb. 11:1 – “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

I want you to underline a few words here in (v. 1) and as we attempt to define faith, let's just “nerd out” for a moment and study some of these words in depth.

First, circle the word, “faith”, and then underline the words: “assurance” and “conviction”.

The writer of Hebrews (we don't know who it is) says that faith is the “assurance” of things hoped for and the “conviction” of things not seen.

“Assurance” – depending on your translation, it may use the word “reality” or “substance”. The word means to “place under, to support...it's a foundation – a solid guarantee.”

Any word study you do on this word in the original language will give you this word picture of a “title deed”. When you buy a house, you receive a legal document that declares you as the owner of the home. You might not be living there yet, but if you have the deed, it's yours!

It's a reality. It's a guarantee. That deed is the “substance” that ensures it's yours. Here the writer of Hebrews tells us that faith is the solid guarantee of what we hope for!

Now, mark this: Faith involves two things: While there is a present reality to faith (title deed *illus*) faith has to do with the future. Notice the language – it's what's hoped for (future tense). It also has to do with the invisible...the unseen!

In our context of Hebrews 11, while this is the start of a chapter in our Bibles, that came later...it flows right out of Hebrews 10, and listen to what the writer has mentioned up to this point!

Heb. 10:32-39 – “But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. (that's future and unseen.) ³⁵ Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. (that's future and unseen) ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. (that's future and unseen) ³⁷ For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; (that's future and unseen) ³⁸ but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.” ³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. (that's future and unseen)”

See, our faith involves the future and the invisible. What we hope for and have a solid confidence in, we can't see with our physical eyes.

Recall the words of Paul in **Rom. 8:24b** – “... Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?”

The reason “faith” is sometimes a tough pill for many to swallow or wrap their minds around is because faith by its very definition involves unseen realities that we won’t know fully until one day in the future.

But listen: just because they are unseen, does not make them untrue. This is the second part of (v. 1). Look at it!

Heb. 11:1 – “Now faith is the assurance (the reality...the substance) of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

“conviction” – it’s a word that means “proof” or “certainty”. It was a legal term...it’s “evidence”.

If we were in a court room, and we proved a case, it’s because we brought forth evidence! This is the word being used here, and evidence and conviction IS in the words of commentator, E.W. Bullinger “produced by demonstration”.

In other words, faith is NOT wishful thinking! There’s certainty to it EVEN when it’s unseen. Why? Because our faith involves God! The ultimate unseen reality.

FAITH assures us that what we are hoping for (and in this context, what we’re hoping for is life in Christ and with Christ forever – it’s our eternal security and our eternal future). FAITH assures us that what we are hoping for is guaranteed...we’re certain of it...even if we can’t see it!

You could almost describe faith as the 6th sense. As humans, we have FIVE primary senses. Remember what they are:

1. Sight
2. Hearing
3. Touch
4. Taste
5. Smell

As humans, made in the image of God, we EACH have the capacity for this 6th sense. Now, God has to awaken us to what we term “saving faith” - we’ll get there in a moment, but ALL of us have the capacity to understand faith and walk in faith – we do it every day.

Romans 12:3 – “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”

Each of us have some measure of faith, and we walk in it every day. We have faith:

- that bridges won't collapse when we drive across them...
- that food is safe when it is put before us...
- that the doctors know what they are doing when they prescribe certain medicines and...
- that those certain medicines will work when given to us...

My goodness, when we travel, don't we all do this? We get somewhere and we've never been there before and have to go to a place we've never been before. What do we do? We put the address in our GPS system and we just follow the directions – it's TOTALLY on faith! We have no idea where we are going OR how to get there!

We ALL exercise faith – having faith is NOT really the ISSUE or the struggle!

If we were honest – and I'm talking about those that don't know God and are not walking with him (We'll get to those that do know him in a moment) – for those that don't know God, the struggle with faith (IF HONEST) is really only present when the subject matter is God.

And isn't this the thinking? "I can't believe or have faith in a God I've never seen him physically...never heard him audibly...never touched him physically – how am I supposed to believe this? How can you Christians believe (Heb. 11:3) – that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible."

And the Christian response is, "We believe in God and believe this about God in the same way you don't! - By faith."

Christians believe "by faith" the ultimate unseen reality is God. He started it all. He spoke everything that exists INTO existence – simply by the power of his spoken voice. And how do we believe this? – "by faith".

As commentator, **Thomas Lea** writes: "**Eyesight produces a conviction about objects in the physical world. Faith produces the same convictions for the invisible order.**"

We as Christians, believe in God and that he created it all by faith. If you are an unbeliever...I don't know how you think all this came to be – it was a "big bang" it was elements heating up coming together, atoms separating – However you believe it all came together – guess what? You know how you believe that: "by faith."

Illus. God and atheist contest – atheist said, I can make man just like you! God said, "okay, go for it." The atheist said, "We'll each take some dirt, and we'll make man. And he started, and God said, "Get your own dirt!"

It all had to start somewhere! And as Christians, we believe it all started with God. What's this faith based on? How can we have this assurance? This confidence?

It's based on the revealed Word of God (God's Word given to us) and backed by his character and nature.

My assurance of things hoped for...my certainty of that which is unseen (My faith) is based entirely upon God's revealed word as he has given it to us (i.e. the Bible) AND it is backed by his nature and character.

I want you to note: faith is NOT a feeling. For some, if you don't feel it, then it's not real...and sometimes in chasing faith or trying to live by faith, some are always trying to harness a feeling...an emotion.

Faith is NOT a feeling...it's NOT an emotion. It can affect your feelings and emotions, but it's not the same.

For others, faith is about figures. The idea here is if I have it all figured out...if everything is lining up...if everything makes sense then of course faith is present and follows, but that's not faith.

As we will see throughout Hebrews 11, the reason people are in the "Hall of Faith" is because they believed God and followed him:

- when everything was NOT lining up...
- when they couldn't figure everything out...
- when NOTHING was making sense...

As commentator, **F.F Bruce** wrote: **"Their faith consisted simply in taking God at his word and directing their lives accordingly; things yet future as far as their experience went were thus present to faith, and things outwardly unseen were visible to the inward eye."**

The apostle Paul said it plainly in **2 Cor. 5:7** – **"for we walk by faith, not by sight."**

I'll close this section of the message out with the faith definition that is found in our *NextStep* guides.

Illus. NextSteps - (tell the story of NextStep). The VERY first session is on faith, and it gives a faith definition and the definition is repeated each week because if we don't get this right (the foundation) the house will crumble!

Faith – Choosing to live as though God's Word is true (because it is! Backed by his character and nature) **regardless of circumstances; regardless of emotions and regardless of cultural trends.**

So, we are defining faith. Now, let's move to: **Describing Faith**

By this, I mean let's answer some questions. What does faith do? Why is faith so important? How do we grow our faith?

Illus. Staff Chapel – set up what it is and share about it (SHOW PIC of Champion of Champions)

This week in Chapel, we were talking about last week's message concerning the four friends, bringing their paralyzed friend to Jesus to be healed. I mentioned in my application of that message four pillars of having a "whatever it takes to reach one more" mindset.

One of those pillars was: **We must have faith that believes the impossible**

At chapel I did a deep dive into each of these four pillars and under this one, I shared with the team SOME (operative term – you could put a lot of subsets under what I'm sharing here – this is SOME) of what faith does according to the Bible.

1. Faith saves us

Rom. 3:28 – "For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law."

Eph. 2:8-9 – "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

So, here we see that faith saves us and saving faith is a gift given to us by God. We all have a measure of faith given to us by God, but for those of who have trusted in Christ, even that faith to believe is a gift from God.

Illus. Wheelbarrow – belief vs trust (intellectual belief – the demons believe and shudder – they don't have saving faith!) Saving faith is getting in the wheelbarrow and even the ability to understand this and walk in is a gift from God.

Saving faith is not just past tense...it's present as well. Faith is how we walk with God now...today. We walk by faith, not sight, and as we give ourselves to God's Word, we will continue to grow in this faith that saves us – saving faith becomes sanctifying faith.

We have been saved by faith and we are currently being saved by faith and we will one day be saved by faith.

2. Faith pleases God

Heb. 11:2 – "For by it (faith) the people of old received their commendation."

Some translations put this, for by it "our ancestors won God's approval."

Heb. 11:6a – "And without faith it is impossible to please him..."

Faith is the language God speaks! If we want to live a life pleasing to him, what's it take? FAITH! Do we want MORE of our life to be pleasing to God – how does it happen – a living, breathing faith!

And you read Hebrews 11...we'll see it throughout this series. Talk about "Faith described". Living by faith meant:

- taking risks...
- making sacrifices...
- bringing your best offering...
- embracing suffering...
- getting out of your comfort zone...
- believing even when asked to do the impossible...
- trusting even when called to do what sounds crazy...

According to Hebrews 11, all of those mentioned please God because they said, "Yes" to God even when it didn't make sense and they followed God even when it costs...some of them it cost their lives.

If we are going to please God, Champion Forest, it's going to take us doing some things that are "by faith". It may not make sense on the outside...it may not add up...it may sound crazy, but let's commit now to be set on pleasing God above it all.

I want more of God, and if we want more of God, we must understand and remember God speaks the language of faith! He is attracted to faith like bugs to light...like two magnets!

In fact, there are two times in scripture where it is said that Jesus "marveled" at someone's faith...interesting case study that we don't have time to go into. One situation was with a Roman centurion (Matt. 8:5-13 – servant sick) – "just say the word..."

Matt. 8:10 – "When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith."

The second situation was a Canaanite pagan woman who approached Jesus one evening begging Jesus to heal her daughter who was oppressed by a demon (Matt. 15:21-28). "It's not right to take children's bread and throw it to the dogs (explain)

Matt. 15:27-28 – "She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly."

Amazing! The faith that got God's attention! Puts us to shame really...he marvels at a Roman centurion's faith...a pagan woman's faith and yet in the scripture compare that to the "people of God" – i.e. Israel

Matt. 13:58 – "And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief."

How many times did he rail against the religious leaders for their unbelief...the disciples – how many times did we hear Jesus say to them, "O, You of little faith!"

I don't want the faith of pagans to put me to shame! I want God to marvel at my faith...I want God to look at our church and see that's a people that believe and are showing it by how they live – they have a LIVING FAITH!

1. Faith saves us.
2. Faith pleases God.
3. **Faith unlocks God's power**

We're told the story in the Bible of two blind men coming to Jesus and they ask for Jesus to heal them. Jesus said, "Do you believe that I can do this?" And they said, "Yes, Lord.

Matt. 9:29 – "Then he touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you."

Matt. 21:21-22 – "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt...if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen. ²² And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

Underscore this here...it's not the size of faith that matters, it's the size of our God – but our God is HUGE! He can do anything and faith is the currency that he consumes.

- When we bless him "by faith" when the storm clouds are over our lives...he smiles on that kind of faith...
- When we "by faith" give our tithe and trust him when it's difficult for ends to meet...he smiles on that kind of faith...
- When we share our faith with that friend or co-worker and it scares us to death to do so, but we move forward in it "by faith", that faith unlocks the power of God in our life.

Faith saves us. Faith pleases God. And faith unlocks God's power in our life. You want MORE faith which means MORE of pleasing God? Want MORE faith which means MORE of God's power?

How do you get it? How can we increase our faith? How can we grow stronger in our faith?

Rom. 10:17 – "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

Faith...a living faith is contingent upon time in God's Word and prayer followed by obedience to do what God asks of you. A living faith is active...it takes steps of faith in accordance to God's Word.

Let me end with what I'm calling: **Declaring Faith**

Do NOT confuse what I'm saying with these "word of faith" movements that are in some pockets of Christendom (if they even fit in Christendom). There is some teaching out there that says if you just believe enough, you can just speak things into existence and if you just believe it

enough...have faith in it enough, well then, you'll never suffer and never be in need – just declare it into being!

The Greek word for that is “bologna” ...the Hebrew is “hogwash”.

We don't speak things into existence – God does that! Our job is to declare his truth over our lives and “by faith” submit to his good sovereignty and will.

So, as it relates to MORE...MORE faith...MORE of God in your life.

Let me close this sermon out by giving you several faith declarations to begin making over your life. I encourage you to write these down and pray them over your life ever morning so that you can experience MORE: A living faith

- 1. Lord, I choose to experience MORE of you by walking by faith, not by sight.**
- 2. Lord, because you can do MORE than I could ever ask, think or imagine, I pray bold prayers in faith and will leave the results up to you.**
- 3. Lord, nothing is impossible with you, so help me to attempt MORE for your glory.**

Let's go after MORE...and ask God to give us a living faith.

Will you pray with me?