

Examples of Persevering in Faith Without Proof

Hebrews 11:1-16; August 17, 2025

Welcome to our official first Sunday of the school year. Now that students are back in school, there are ripe opportunities for growth. Please see the information in your bulletin for details.

I remember going to the Professional Football Hall of Fame in the late 1970s. It was the height of the Dallas Cowboy vs. Pittsburgh Steeler era.

- I remember that I came home with 2 refrigerator magnets that looked like football helmets. One was the cowboys, and I cannot remember the other. I also had a coin bank shaped like the Hall of Fame building. It was a cool experience.

I am sure that the movie clips, décor, and displays have made the experience far better today. But I doubt the overall message has changed. Don't you want to be in the Pro Football Hall of Fame just like some of your favorite players?

- Absolutely! Would it be cool to see a highlight video of all your best plays?
 - o I could imagine playing linebacker and making a huge interception and running for a touchdown. Later, I would make the stop on third down. I would return the for a touchdown. I would be Mr. Everything!
- I left energized because I thought, "Yea, it would be cool to be a professional football player and show my children all my best plays."
- It did not take long for reality to set in. I would never have the size, strength, toughness, or ability to make it. I had to submit to the reality that my only chance of doing all I dreamed about was on an XBOX set on easy mode.
 - o I realize I am not alone. I read one statistic that said of the 1.1 million HS football players in 2016, 250 made it to the NFL. Not good odds.

Our journey today is not to the pro football hall of fame, but the Lord's hall of Faith. We are heading to Hebrews 11, but before we arrive, let's look ahead at Hebrews 12 to see our destination.

Hebrews 12:1-3 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of 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.

We will study this passage in detail in two weeks, but the exhortations provided here are based on a proper reflection of Hebrews 11. When we get Hebrews 11 right, then...

- We will shed our garbage (whatever the encumbrances and sin are)
- We will fix our eyes on Jesus ... **Our annual theme for 2025**
- We will live with courage, steadfastness, and energy

Now, with the end in mind, please turn with me to Hebrews 11:1.

As you are getting there, I would like to remind you that Greg taught that we must encourage each other to love and good deeds. It was not optional. That means we need to be with people.

- Dustin explained one of the most severe warning passages in the Bible.
 - Don't be a fake because Jesus knows and he will take vengeance.
 - But since most of his audience is comprised of faithful followers of Jesus, he applauds how they handled their suffering and encourages them to keep exercising faith.

It is here that we pick up the argument. Please follow along as I read Hebrews 11:1-16. This is the Word of the Lord. *Read Hebrews 11:1-16*. The title of the message this morning is **Examples of Persevering in Faith Without Proof**. Please notice ...

I. Faith means that we will not have proof (vv. 1-2)

Hebrews 11:1-2 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. **2 For by it the men of old gained approval.**

Everyone exercises faith in certain things every day. I have faith that the people who drive on the roads at the same time I do, will basically follow the law. I have faith, generally speaking, that the items I need at the grocery store will be there when I shop.

- We all exercise faith in certain things every day.

The Lord wants that faith applied to him. That is why at the end of 40 verses of illustrations, the exhortation is shed your garbage, fix your eyes on Jesus, and live with courage, steadfastness, and energy.

In 10:39, he expressed confidence that his readers would not give up their faith, pretend like Jesus does not matter, and do what they want.

- He expected them to persevere even after enduring the suffering described in vv. 32-34.
 - They had many experiences personally that demonstrated their faith was reasonable.

The Bible never suggests that we must have a blind faith or an irrational one. That was true in Bible times and true today. Since they were experiencing intense pressure ...

- He reminds them that faith is a resolute confidence in something you cannot confirm with your senses.
 - They had to hold fast their conviction in who Jesus is, the promises that he made, the work they had seen in their personal lives and in the world around them.

That is true for each of us. We hold fast our confession. We keep our Faith. We remain resolute in our belief that Jesus is exactly who he says he is. In the words of 1 Timothy 3 He who was

revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. That is our savior.

II. Each example died before they saw the fulfillment (v. 13)

Hebrews 11:13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

The Bible acknowledges in multiple places the greatest argument against believing in Jesus or in keeping one's faith is some promises have not been fulfilled.

- If Jesus is going to return, where is he?
- How do I know he is returning because it seems like time moves without any regard what came before or what will come after?
 - o Peter taught that we should appreciate God's patience rather than clamor for all to be fulfilled.

2 Peter 3:7-9 But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. 8 But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. 9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

The Lord's patience represents opportunity. Fulfilling his promises concludes the opportunity. The ungodly reserved for fire does not sound particularly pleasant.

If you know Christ as your Lord and savior, you will always have voices and events that press your faith.

- You may experience loss, grief, trial, hardship, or ridicule. It might lead you to doubt.
- You might sin in grievous ways. You might be stuck in guilt and shame or maybe nothing seems to happen so you wonder if God even cares.
- Satan and his host will want to drive home any doubts you might have and exploit them. In C.S. Lewis' creepy book the Screwtape Letters, Screwtape helps Wormwood influence the Patient. It is a fictional account of what our spiritual warfare might look like. His goals include casting doubt and making you ineffective.

But God has not left us to fight this battle alone. Hebrews says, remember the former days when you lived faithfully. Keep it up.

- Philippians says if there is any encouragement in Christ ... you know there is, if any fellowship of the Spirit ... you know there is.
- The Psalms say, Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!
- Hebrews says draw near, hold fast your confession, and encourage each other to love and good deeds.

- Hebrews also says, which we will see in just a minute, check out others who kept their faith and died before they saw the fulfillment.

Friends we are going to fight together to shed our garbage, fix our eyes on Jesus, and live with courage, steadfastness, and energy because Jesus is worth it.

If you do not have a saving relationship with Jesus, then please notice that the Bible is addressing one of your potential objections. It does not hide from it or ridicule you for raising it. The Lord invites the questions and he provides the answers.

- Your choices are fury of fire, the terrifying experiences of falling into the hands of an angry God OR
- Submitting yourself to the truth of Scripture. To agreeing that Jesus is who he says he is, repenting of your view of him and placing your hope and trust in the finished work of Jesus for your salvation.
- We are happy to meet with you to speak about your need for Christ.

The saying we have used to launch our fall ministries is “Jesus makes life better.” We believe that a relationship with Jesus changes your life now and the one to come.

III. Each example longed for the ultimate promises (vv. 14-16)

Hebrews 11:14-16 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. 15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that *country* from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 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 a city for them.

Each of the examples we will see, died longing for their heavenly home. They longed to dwell where they had official citizenship. They knew that this earth and its various pleasures could not ultimately satisfy.

- They could use their time, energy, and resources as gifts from God designed for joy, but that would not compare to the glory that was yet to be revealed. Thus, here is the essence of chapter 11 ...

Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

In a nutshell, there is the reality of faith. We believe that the God exists, that we draw near to him with radical openness, and we believe he rewards those who seek him.

I covered the theory. We know now that biblical faith is the resolute confidence in God and his Word.

- We know that our faith is not blind because there is a great cloud of witnesses along with our own personal experience.

- We know that biblical faith results in shedding our garbage, fixing our eyes on Jesus, and living with courage, steadfastness, and energy knowing that a better country still awaits those who seek him.

Now it is time to consider the examples, each starting with the phrase “by faith”

IV. Five Personal Examples of those who exercised faith (vv. 3-12)

The first example is not tied to a particular person, but rather to a collective whole that seems to include the Hebrews.

Hebrews 11:3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

No one was there to see creation except God himself. Thus, every theory about the origin of the earth, galaxy, world, and people is taken by faith.

- You cannot run a series of tests and create something out of nothing.
- At Faith we believe that God created the world in 7 days. We are not ashamed of that.
 - o Certain elements we take by faith, just like all others espouse their views by faith.

I remember taking an astronomy class because I needed a few easy credits. To my surprise, the professor announced in an auditorium of some 700 students that if God created the world with memory, it would explain every astronomical claim regarding the origin of the universe. He wanted to demonstrate that faith is always involved.

God is pleased when we rightly give him credit for what he has made. Now the Lord starts us on a journey of OT history.

Example #1: Abel (v. 4)

Hebrews 11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

Faithful Person	OT Passage	How they exercised faith	Significance
Abel	Genesis 4:1-16	Abel offered a sacrifice according to the Lord's instructions.	His example of faith still speaks.

Different theories have been suggested why Abel's sacrifice was better.

- Some suggest he offered a lamb whereas Cain offered grain. That made it better.
- Some suggest Abel offered the best he had while Cain did the minimum.
- Others point to the grain offering that Lord required for Israel as evidence that the problem was not what was offered, but the attitude with which it was offered.

Regardless, God accepted Abel's offering. Sadly, Cain's full heart attitude came out as he not only refused to follow God's instructions, but as he decided to kill Abel.

Abel exercised faith by offering the sacrifice that the Lord instructed believing that God would accept it. Somehow the Lord communicated to both Abel and Cain his views about their various offerings.

Righteous Abel's death still speaks because he lived and acted by faith leaving others an example.

- Are we good with God's instructions as given?
- Do we try to find a way to turn God's instructions into a version we find more palatable?

There is an old children's song that goes includes the words, "The Bible says it and I believe it and that is good enough for me." – That is faith.

Example #2: Enoch (v. 5)

Hebrews 11:5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.

Faithful Person	OT Passage	How they exercised faith	Significance
Enoch	Genesis 5:21-24	He walked with and pleased God for 300 years.	The Lord took him.

Enoch is such an interesting character. The Bible says very little about him. We learn in Genesis 5 that he lived 365 years before God took him to heaven without suffering the pain of death. Notice what Jude says about him ... this might explain why the Lord was so please with him.

Jude 14-15 *It was also about these men that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, 15 to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."*

It seems that the Lord was pleased with his willingness to warn his friends about the coming judgment. Rather than let them work it out for themselves and remain silent, Enoch warns them.

- Throughout human history the Lord has allowed people to speak for him for decades and to be warmly received.
- Others, however, are met with harsh resistance and treatment.
- We cannot possibly know what we will experience.

What we can say is that the Lord is pleased when we stand strong against evil and call people to repentance.

- The Lord will execute final judgment and it is loving, caring, and pleasing to him to remind people of that truth.
- We can ask whether we are equally committed. If we have family members who made a profession at 9, but have lived a life without Jesus, then are we warning them about holding fast their confession?
 - If we have friends who still do not believe are we, at least on occasion, reminding them of the stakes?
 - Are we evangelizing our children knowing that being born in a Christian family is not the same thing as being a Christian?

Example #3: Noah (v. 7)

Hebrews 11:7 By faith Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Faithful Person	OT Passage	How they exercised faith	Significance
Noah	Genesis 6:8-9:29	Noah walked with God. By Faith he followed the Lord's instructions to build the ark.	Part of salvation history

Noah has quite the story. He lives about 500 years walking with God despite all the wickedness around him. God tells him to build an enormous ark which takes another 100 years to build followed by 350 years after coming off the boat. Can you imagine “fireside chats with Noah?” That would have been an amazing podcast.

Noah's faith was in God and his word. When the Lord told him to build an ark, it was time to build it. Despite the challenge and difficulty, Noah was going to do so. Given that it was so big and took so much time, it served as a testimony to all who saw it. I cannot imagine the kind of grief he would have experienced.

By faith, we have instructions too. How we choose to live them out matters.

- Are we willing to go against the crowd and stand out as unique?
- Are you willing to do the Lord's will in your life even if it seems a little crazy?
 - When I quit my job to go to seminary I worked for the company that is today called Accenture. I was already on the fast track to manager having received an early promotion. When I communicated that I was leaving to pursue ministry, the people were supportive for me to do what made me happy, but they thought I was nuts.
 - Sometimes you must be crazy for Jesus if you are going to accomplish his plan. You might not build an ark, but must do something that sounds nuts to live pleasing to him. Don't be afraid to live by faith.
 - Join the church
 - Serve in a new area
 - Be a deacon

- Consider vocational ministry
- Are you willing to do something for a long time because it is right?
 - One of my seminary professors once complained about how quickly men would change ministries. He thought if they had only stayed, they had the potential of seeing real results.
 - Sometimes that is how life is. You don't change as fast as others would like. Neither does your spouse. Nor do your children. Learning to play the long game is sometimes an important part of our spiritual life.

Example #4: Abraham (vv. 8-10)

Hebrews 11:8-10 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Faithful Person	OT Passage	How they exercised faith	Significance
Abraham	Genesis 11:26-25:11	He believed and acted upon what God told him including (1) leaving home without a final destination (2) living as an alien in a land promised to him and (3) looking for the place God built.	It means you don't know the end result. Being satisfied with less in the will of God Longing for God's provision in his time

Abraham is in the hall of faith for multiple reasons. The Lord chooses to talk about living arrangements first. When I read this story I try to envision what this would be like. While I have moved several times, I have never moved not knowing where I would put my stuff. There is a sense in which I have no grid for this.

Abraham is asked to leave his home without a final destination, live for a period of time as an alien or foreigner, and to wait for God's further instructions. Nothing seems comfortable about this.

But what I think we can all understand is doing something we believe the Lord wants us to do without knowing what will happen.

- Those of us who are married chose our spouse because we believe that the Lord would be pleased by our choice. If that was not the case, we ended the relationship. But no one knows on their wedding day what will happen in the future. You make a choice by faith.
- We cannot enter a career or change one knowing the future. We make our choices by faith not knowing what the future holds.

Abraham lives, for a time, as a foreigner. That can put us in an uneasy situation. The Lord has allowed me to be in several other countries. Every time, landing in the US brought a sense of

relief because I am home. I know how life works, I speak the language, I know the geography, my credit card works, I don't have to worry about international plans, and I know how to get help.

- Sometimes the Lord allows us to be uncomfortable to test our faith and determine our commitment to do his will.
- Sometimes we must be satisfied with less knowing that this is the Lord's will.

Are we okay with the Lord's plan for our life even if it means a little discomfort? A little uncertainty? A little uneasiness?

Our final example this morning is ...

Example #5: Sarah (vv. 11-12)

Hebrews 11:11-12 By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as *many descendants* as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

Faithful Person	OT Passage	How they exercised faith	Significance
Sarah	Same as above	Sarah believed that God would grant her a son. It was not perfect. Hagar was Sarah's idea. Abraham could have protected his wife rather than used her.	Isaac is the child of promise.

The Abraham and Sarah story is wild. Not only do you have the living arrangements, but you also have the barrenness issue. Abraham is older than Sarah by 10 years or so. They were unsuccessful having children in their early, normally fruitful, years.

- This was an incredible burden. Sarah, despite her age, was such a hottie and that everyone and their brother wanted her. Twice she was taken into the harem of a king and twice God delivered her.

Sarah, frustrated by the waiting (they had waited 10 years for the Lord to deliver a baby once he promised he would), gave Abraham her maiden. Bad idea for both of them. Yet, God still praises Sarah for believing that God would give her a son through Abraham.

She had no reason to believe that Abraham could deliver and neither could she. All she could count on was a God who promised.

- The Lord opens wombs and closes them whether they were supposed to be open or not.
- The Lord delivers on all his promises. So if you pray for grace and mercy, then grace and mercy is what you will receive.

We see over and over again the phrase "by faith." Some things you don't get to see. But that has the way it has always been. We see Jesus. They had to wait for Messiah never to see him. We have to wait for the rest of God's promises to come true. In the meantime, we live and sing "by faith."

There are some huge faith lessons right there. I know that prepping this discussion was encouraging to my heart. These people did not always exercise perfect faith. Abel and Enoch were too short to know much. Noah got hammered. Neither Abraham nor Sarah did it perfectly. But the overarching story of their lives was a life a faith.

- There is hope for us.

We can understand why they made it into the Lord's Hall of Faith. Hang on to the Hall of Fame story and this little observation that faith does not equal perfect faith because we will need them both next week.

I realize that my outline has been passive ... just stating facts rather than providing specific actions. There is a reason for that. My text does not specifically tell us what to do. It describes something for us.

- The Lord gave us illustrations of people who exercised real faith believing that he is the rewarder of those who seek him.
- Sometimes, what you and I need to do in passages like this is slow down to think and pray. We must let the story soak into our souls so that we have the resolve and resolute confidence to live it out despite the trials and battles for our hearts.
 - o Sometimes, the Scripture directly calls us to do something.
 - o Other times, it tells us about something and asks us to work it out, with the Spirit's help, for ourselves.

Yes, we will talk about shedding our garbage, fixing our eyes on Jesus, and living with courage, steadfastness, and energy. There will be a time to talk about charging the gates of hell appealing to as many as possible. But today is not that day.

- Today I meditate on the concept of faith and whether I am willing to live like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, or Sarah. I encourage you to do the same.
 - o Meditate, be honest with yourself, give thanks for what is right, repent for your unwillingness to live by that faith, draw near to Jesus and beg him to help you be a man or woman of faith.

Pray