**God Approves Those Who Live by Faith**

Hebrews 11:17-40; August 24, 2025

Last week I mentioned that I visited the Professional Football Hall of Fame in the 1970s.

* Speaking of football, the new FCS stadium will host its first football game this Friday night … I am planning to be there to support the boys. If you want to see the stadium before the CFN celebration, be there this Friday night. It should be an awesome experience.

The movies, displays, signs, and gift shop at the hall of fame all pointed to the same message: Don’t you want to be in the Hall of Fame too?

* While I and many others would have said yes until we came to grips with the harsh reality that God did not give us the tools for that, what we are talking about is something better than being recognized as a great football player.

We are talking about being approved by God.

* Amazingly enough, we will find tremendous encouragement and hope as we consider the Lord’s Hall of Faith Inductees.

Let’s start with where this text is going:

**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.**

When we unpack this passage next Sunday we will see that a proper understanding of Hebrews 11 results in us (1) shedding our garbage – encumbrance and sin which easily entangles us; (2) fixing our eyes on Jesus; and (3) living with courage, steadfastness, and energy rather than growing weary and losing heart. That is what we do when we take the field.

* That is for next week. We still in the locker room allowing Hebrews 11 to work us over.

We saw a simple definition of faith last Sunday …

**Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**

Every person in Hebrews 11 died waiting for certain promises to be fulfilled.

* Yet, there remained a resolute belief that the Lord would fulfill all his promises because
  + He had worked in their life
  + In the lives of others
  + Had fulfilled some of his promises.
    - Their faith was reasoned and wise rather than irrational and blind.
* They trusted that the Lord would do everything he said.

The title of this message is **God Approves Those Who Live by Faith**. Isn’t it amazing to think that we could be approved by God?

* We see this truth at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of Hebrews 11.

**Hebrews 11:2 For by it [faith] the men of old gained approval.**

**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.**

**Hebrews 11:16 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.**

**Hebrews 11:39-40 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.**

In other words, the chapter tells us how you get inducted into the Lord’s Hall of Faith.

* Is it similar to the pro football hall of fame where 371 players have made it?
* Tens of millions of boys and men have played football and 371 have made to the hall of fame. Is that how the Lord works?

Let’s check it who is included and why they are there.

* I want to start with …

**I. The Obvious Choices**

Last week I said that we could take a long time working through Hebrews 11 because the Lord tell us about OT saints.

* Thus, it can be helpful (if you need an idea for your devotions because you have been stuck) to go back and read the full stories.
  + I can only summarize the material this morning.
* When you read these stories, there are some amazing acts of faith.

Some obvious choices for the Lord’s hall of faith include

1. **Noah – Ark**

**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.**

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| **Faithful Person** | **OT Passage** | **How they exercised faith** | **Significance** |
| Noah | Genesis 6:8-9:29 | Noah walked with God. He built the ark. | Part of salvation history |

I would pin a blue ribbon on Noah’s chest. He followed the Lord’s instructions for 100 years without rain building an ark by faith. He lived a total of 900 years faithfully for the Lord. He makes total sense. We ought to have a life-sized ark near Cincinnati and I loved our Noah’s ark nursery decorations. Noah was an obvious choice.

1. **Abraham – Killing Issac**

**Hebrews 11:17, 19 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten *son;* …19 He considered that God is able to raise *people* even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.**

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| **Faithful Person** | **OT Passage** | **How they exercised faith** | **Significance of their faith** |
| Abraham | Gen 22:1-19 | He as willing to offer Isaac believing that God would raise him from the dead. | God can bring about his promises no matter what. |

Abraham was another faith studmuffin. He obeyed the Lord’s command to leave his home and go to a place God would show him. He believed God would give him a son at 100 years old. But the blue ribbon comes in vv. 17-19.

* Abraham had waited 25 years for this son. Isaac is likely in his late teens.
* God tells Abraham to sacrifice him. It must have blown his mind.
  + Can you imagine sleeping the night before the journey?
  + What do you talk about when you know you are leading Isaac to his death?

Yet, Abraham’s faith remains resolute. He is willing to offer Isaac because he believed that God would raise him from the dead. This story is truly remarkable.

* How many of us would have not obeyed assuming we heard the message wrong?
* How many of us would have argued with God that surely he does not expect the unreasonable?

Abraham is convinced that God will do great things and keep all his promises. He is an obvious choice although he has a baggage with his self preservation and lies about Sarah.

1. **Moses’ parents – Preserving Moses**

**Hebrews 11:23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.**

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| **Faithful Person** | **OT Passage** | **How they exercised faith** | **Significance of their faith** |
| Moses’ parents | Exodus 2 | They believe God set Moses apart and kept him at great personal risk | Salvation history |

I don’t believe that this passage is saying that Moses’ parents wanted to preserve him because he was good-looking subtly implying that they would have followed the king’s orders had he been ugly. That is why the NIV translates this phrase, “no ordinary child.”

* I think the point is that Moses’ parents believed that God set apart Moses for a particular purpose.
* The Bible does not tell us why they might have believed that, but it appears that they were willing to take the risk associated with hiding him.

In that sense they exercised faith in whatever plans God had for Moses even at the risk of his death and theirs. Whenever a person puts their life on the line for the Lord – that is noteworthy faith.

* Many of us have never had to make a choice like this. Our faith might cost us a little ridicule, but rarely our livelihood or our life.

Although this is a short story, it is still inspirational and it makes sense that they would be in the hall of faith.

1. **Moses – Giving up all for the Lord and to lead courageously**

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| **Faithful Person** | **OT Passage** | **How they exercised faith** | **Significance of their faith** |
| Moses | Exodus 2-15 | Moses gave up riches, power, and position to obey the Lord. Then he went back to lead out the Lord’s people | A Christ-like figure; Rescue of Messiah’s nation |

Moses is a key OT figure. In a few short verses it summarizes 80+ years. He grew up in wealth and power. Yet, when the time was right and his understanding sure, he leaves it all.

* He exchanged the wealth and beauty of Egypt (the passing pleasures of sin … hard to know what all of those might have been in the house of the most powerful man in the world) for the reproach of Christ.
  + We do not know if Moses fully grasped Messiah, but he certainly understood that he was exchanging wealth and power for poverty and ridicule. Just as Jesus would do many years later.
  + That would seem like a difficult choice. If we had to sacrifice it all, would we be willing?

Then, at the proper time, he returns to Egypt and does not fear Pharoah as God delivers the 10 plagues and leads them out of Egypt.

* Moses argues with the Lord about this, but ultimately goes. When he arrives, he remains strong and refuses to be intimidated or driven off mission.
* I put Exodus 2-15 as the primary passage, but we could list Exodus 2 to the end of Deuteronomy. Man alive, it was not easy to lead the Israelites. Moses decides that this was the Lord’s will and he was committed to the Lord and believed by faith all his promises.

His story is remarkable too.

1. **Rahab – Welcomed the Spies**

**Hebrews 11:31 By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.**

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| **Faithful Person** | **OT Passage** | **How they exercised faith** | **Significance of their faith** |
| Rahab | Joshua 6 | She risked her life to believe the spies | Started conquest |

Rahab apparently lived a sketchy life. For reasons the Bible does not tell us, she became a woman of the night. It made perfect sense for the spies to visit her. People would have been used to seeing customers come and go. But what makes the story remarkable is her willingness to believe by faith that God was with them.

* She takes the additional risk of hiding the spies, giving them the normal city protocols, and explaining how to return safely.
* Her willingness to believe, exercise faith, and take risk was ultimately rewarded.
* She survived the conquest and was adopted into the Israelite community.

Not only does she take her place in the hall of faith; she is in the line of Jesus. My next two entries are briefly described in v. 32-34 among a list of those who exercised faith and some of the results of that faith.

**Hebrews 11:32 And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, 33 who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed *acts of* righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.**

Let me pull two more specific names…

1. **David – man after God’s own heart**

David was a righteous king living faithfully for the Lord. He exhibited that by his servant’s heart in his father’s house, his reliance on the Lord when defeating Goliath, his commitment to the Lord when threatened, and his willingness to lead the nation to worship.

* When David failed and he failed in some major ways, he repented of his sin.

David, the greatest king, was a man of deep faith and someone that the Lord said was a person after God’s own heart. It makes perfect sense that he would here.

1. **Samuel – First prophet, priest, and king-like figure**

Samuel was the first prophet, priest, and king like figure. He was an answer to his mother’s prayer and she dedicated him to the Lord. Growing up in Eli’s house, he experiences a staggering and God-orchastrated rise to power. Yet none of that goes to his head. He remains deeply faithful to the Lord.

* Maybe it is worth mentioning that despite Samuel’s long life, there is very little written about his sin.
* He is another clear choice for entry into the hall of faith.

My final obvious choice comes at the end of the chapter when the Lord reminds us of the faithful believers who looked for a heavenly city, believing that the Lord would deliver what he promised despite horrible treatment.

1. **The ones who endured torture and death**

**Hebrews 11:35-38 Women received *back* their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; 36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated 38 (*men* of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.**

We see the greatness of faith and the cruel depravity of man in a single passage. I can neither imagine being sawn in two nor doing it to someone. Yet, God’s people have kept their faith not in winning battles (like some in this chapter), but in dying in those battles.

* Throughout history men and women faced the choice of suffer and/or die or give up their faith. Recant of Scripture or face torture and death.

The Lord’s testimony is that the world was not worthy to be in their presence despite the misery of their existence.

All of these individuals exercised amazing faith. Each one of them died awaiting the fulfillment of certain promises. Each story allows us to ask questions like …

* Is my faith stronger than my fears?
* Am I content to let God’s Word stand or do I think I need to add some stuff to make it better or more palatable?
* Am I willing to take risk for Jesus’ sake?
* Am I willing to live according to the truth even if it costs me something?
* Am I willing to suffer or sacrifice for what I believe is right by faith?
* Am I willing to acknowledge my struggle with faith and ask the Lord and others for help?

The obvious choices press us to determine how faithful we are. That is not all. There is another group I am calling …

**II. The runner’s up**

1. **Isaac, Jacob, & Joseph – Passing the promise to the next generation**

**Hebrews 11:20-22 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. 21 By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, *leaning* on the top of his staff. 22 By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.**

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| **Faithful Person** | **OT Passage** | **How they exercised faith** | **Significance of their faith** |
| Isaac, Jacob, Joseph | Genesis 27, 49, and 50 | They passed on the blessing to the next generation. | Each is part of salvation history |

Joseph would go in the obvious choices for his response to his slavery and human trafficking, how he ran from Potipher’s wife, and how he treated his brothers after he had power.

* His statement that what they meant for evil God meant for good is a powerful testimony of Joseph’s commitment to the Lord.

However, Hebrews links Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph together along the theme of longing for God’s fulfilled promises at their death. Each of them passed on the promises to the next generation.

When linking them, that brings the stories of Isaac and Jacob together.

* They had their issues.
* Yet, among all their passivity, weakness, deception, and manipulation, what linked their faith was the promises that passed to the next generation.

This is the first hint that we find that the Lord’s hall of faith is nothing like the NFL’s Hall of Fame. The Lord is far more gracious and forgiving than we could have ever imagined.

1. **Nation at Jericho**

**Hebrews 11:30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.**

God commanded the nation to walk around Jericho every day for 6 days and then 7 times on the 7th day. The walled area of Jericho was about 10 acres – smaller than the Faith East property.

However, a walled city was still difficult to take. The plan of walking around it and then shouting does not seem intimidating.

* How many of you have seen Veggie tales? They songs are so funny and catchy.
* They imagine this story for a moment and here is a 40 second clip just for fun. (**first 44 seconds of** [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXM2o\_Hb9Ls**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXM2o_Hb9Ls) **please**)

While the nation submitted to the plan, during the raid, one family stole and hid the items resulting in great trials for the nation. It was a good moment of faith aid a lot of complaining.

1. **Gideon**

**Hebrews 11:32 And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, 33 who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed *acts of* righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.**

Gideon is mentioned in a list of people who did really cool stuff by Faith. I admit, taking on an army of 100,000 with 300 people is pretty awesome. Okay, it is downright legendary. The problem comes when you read the actual story of Gideon because you find …

* When the men attack the army they shout, “for God and for Gideon.” I get the “for God” part. I struggle a bit more with the “for Gideon.”
* People wanted to make him king (remember that OT kings might rule entire nations, but they could also refer to much smaller units almost like a governor or a mayor in our culture).
  + He refuses. Awesome! Except he names his child, when properly translated, “my father is king.”

Yes, the story is cool, but Gideon apparently was quite proud.

1. **Some of the Prophets like Jonah**

Some of the prophets like Daniel were amazing. Their faith stood the full test of time. You wonder how he could have been any godlier. However, by referencing the prophets in general you also get other characters like Jonah.

It is true that Jonah went to Nineveh and preached to the people. Then he complained when God did not crush them.

* But let’s be frank, if one or our children obeyed like Jonah we would not be impressed.
  + We might be thankful they went, but we would still talk to them about the need to obey happily because following the Lord brings joy.

I bring this up because we sometimes miss just how wonderful and gracious our Lord is.

* There were the clear blue ribbon winners, but the Lord had plenty of grace and compliments for those with less than perfect stories.

Last week we sang, He will hold me fast. That is what Jesus does. He perseveres our faith. I, at times, have a challenge relating to the obvious hall of faith choices. They were amazing. It is exciting to read how the Lord helped them.

* It is also encouraging to see that others like Isaac, Jacob, the nation, and Gideon were approved by God for their faith while they struggled.

Maybe what is most surprising about this chapter is some additional names that the Lord includes. I am calling these …

**III. The Head Scratchers**

There are three names in particular that seem surprising because their stories are largely dark with just a little positive element to emulate.

1. **Barak**

Barak (v. 32) – Barak lives at the time of the judges. Similar to Gideon, he defeats a superior military force with God’s help.

* The story draws you into a man who exercises great faith staring death in the face. That was super cool and super amazing. He exercised great faith to accomplish what he did.

His story is not perfect. He should not have asked Deborah to go with him. She told him that he would not get the glory for the victory. He was criticized for wanting her to be physically present. It was a time when fear was crushing his faith.

* In fact, Barak pursues Sisera, but before he overtakes him Sisera runs into Jael who kills him. Thus, when we think about Judges 4 we think about Deborah and Jael rather than Barak.

1. **Samson**

Samson made the list. Samson had issues. Is that fair?

* For all of his supernatural strength, he chose to reject the Lord at multiple levels. He violates his Nazarite vow, he unlawfully marries, disrespects his parents and the Word, he engages with prostitutes, and he is manipulative and deceitful.
* He acknowledges the Spirit of the Lord coming upon him. That is good. At the end of his life he exercises great faith and destroys more pagan leadership in that single act, than in all his other actions combined.

Apparently, you can royally mess up, have 5 minutes of strong faith and make it into the hall of faith!

1. **Jephthah**

This is the most shocking addition. He also defeated enemies and did so by faith. That is why he in included. However, his story in Judges is even more troubling.

* Hebrews does not choose to tell us about his wicked vow that results in him murdering his only daughter.

Next week we will see strongly worded exhortations on what a proper understand of Hebrews 11 should produce. For today, it shows the core of biblical Christianity – live by faith.

God approves of those who live by Faith.

* That does not mean the Lord approves of every last thing they did.
* Nor does it mean that foolishness cancels out faith.

This list of people in Hebrews 11 were not alive to see Messiah. That waited for us. We have far more fulfilled promises to look upon.

* Yet, we join with them in waiting for the ultimate return of Jesus the Messiah.
* Ironically, it does not take much to be approved by God – put your faith in him.

This also explains why the NT so strongly condemns those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus. We have no excuse. So much is seen and available that it is difficult to miss it.

Some say that the OT God is full of vengeance while the NT God is full of grace. That is a lie from the pit. God has always been gracious commanding people to believe his instructions by faith. When they do he approves them. When they do not, then we find the strong language of the NT which says.

**2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 For after all it is *only* just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and *to give* relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 10 when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.**

I am asking that you place your faith in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation.

Christian friend, maybe you think of yourself as an obvious choice, a runner up, or even a head scratcher. That is one of the great beauties of the gospel.

* Jesus’ righteousness applied to your account results in the Father seeing you through the glorious perfections of Jesus.
* Let’s meditate on these faith examples, ask ourselves whether we are willing to live by faith, and then rejoice that the Lord includes all of us in his hall who walk by faith and not by sight.

By faith the church was called to go; In the power of the Spirit to the lost  
To deliver captives and to preach good news; In every corner of the earth

We will stand as children of the promise; We will fix our eyes on Him our soul's reward  
Till the race is finished and the work is done; We'll walk by faith and not by sight

Meditate, be honest with yourself, praise the Lord for the ways you have lived by faith and repent for your unwillingness, draw near to Jesus and beg him to help you be a man or woman of faith.

Pray