

Hello SOCC! My name is Grant Gardner, and I am the Middle School Minister on staff here at Sherwood Oaks. I have been on staff teaching middle schoolers for the last 4 years now and it's been amazing. I truly love the experience of getting to work with this next generation. But this is actually my first sermon here in main service, so as Shawn was helping me prepare, I was joking that the story of Jonah is one of my favorite stories in the Bible. Maybe you've heard it before as the Bible story of Jonah and the big fish. I encourage you to read it for yourself, it's not very long and it's a great book. But towards the end Jonah gives this sermon to the people of Nineveh which I believe to be one of the worst sermons of all time, *"Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."* -*Jonah 3:4*. And after that it says the Ninevites believed God and everyone from the greatest to the least (including the King) began to repent and turn from their sin. As a minister that is one of the most encouraging passages to me, because if THAT sermon can turn the hearts of an entire city, well then maybe there's hope for God to use someone as unlikely as me.

And that's kind of what we've been talking about this series through Hebrews 11. If you aren't familiar with the passage, the writer of Hebrews is describing this idea of faith lived out through the actions of all of these amazing people we read about in the Old Testament. Some people refer to this section as the Bible's hall of fame, or heroes of faith. Men and women who lived out what it means to trust and follow God. If you were here with us at the start of this series, Beth Long and David Schunk gave a great sermon setting up what we would be going through. They chose to focus on the first two verses of this passage in what I believe to be the thesis statement of this chapter.

*“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*

*This is what the ancients were commended for.”*

*Hebrews 11:1-2 NIV*

The next part of the passage will go on to talk about these heroes of faith, who even when they couldn't see what was next, even when they had their doubts or questions, chose to take a step of faith and trust in God. People like Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph.

Amazing people no doubt, but I want us to take a moment and pause to remember just how human these 'heroes of faith' truly were.

- Abraham and Sarah were old way past the age of having kids who went on to foster a generation of people as numerous as the sands of the sea shore
- Jacob was a liar and a thief that became a father to a nation of people meant to be a trustworthy priesthood to all nations pointing to God.
- Joseph was a tattletale, over-privileged kid who would go on to save both Israel and Egypt from a famine
- David was a shepherd boy who wrote poems in his free time that became one of the greatest warriors and kings of Israel

I don't want us to admire these heroes so much that we forget how human and how unlikely they were to accomplish these great feats.

As I read through the story of the Bible I am constantly reminded that God often chooses to use the most unworthy, and unlikely of people to carry out his mission (x2)

Which brings us today to the story of Moses. Moses is a huge part of God's story, and was the writer of the first five books of the Bible (you might know them as the Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). His story is so big that there is no way we will be able to cover it all today.

“Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.”

-Deuteronomy 34:10-12 NIV

So Moses is kind of a big deal. We're going to be focusing on some key parts of his story today, but I encourage you to read it for yourself because he's an incredible person.

Here is a brief summary for some background context to Moses' story: There was a great famine in the land of Egypt and surrounding settlements, but God had raised up Joseph, an Israelite, to save the people. Joseph is made aware of this famine by God before it happens, and is appointed by the ruler of Egypt to start saving extra food.

Joseph does a great job at this; the famine happens and the people are saved. All sounds great, right? Well it turns out when the Israelites were saved by this famine, they also had to sell almost everything they owned to buy the extra food from Egypt, which included themselves. Many Israelites sold themselves into slavery to buy food for their families. Which was fine at the time because the ruler of Egypt, the Pharaoh, was a big fan of Israelites. I mean Joseph was the one who saved them from the famine. But, things take a change for the worse when a couple generations pass and there's a new sheriff in town. Wasn't actually a sheriff, just a new Pharaoh, but you get the idea. Now this new Pharaoh did not care about Joseph. All he knew was that there were a ton of Israelites around, and he wasn't sure that they would be loyal to Egypt if an opposing army attacked them. So like any good leader he decides to win their favor...just kidding. He appoints slave masters over them and decides to oppress them with forced labor. But this doesn't work, the Israelites only grow more numerous. So he decides to take it up a notch and issue a horrible order that all male babies are to be thrown into the Nile River. And this is where the story of Moses starts. Moses, a Hebrew boy, is born. His mother hides him for 3 months, but when she can no longer keep him hidden, she puts him in a basket and floats him down a river. Now it just so happens the daughter of Pharaoh is bathing in the river during this time when she discovers the basket. I don't think this was any accident by Moses' parents, it most likely would've been known where and when the daughter of Pharaoh chose to bathe.

*“By faith Moses’ parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.”*

*Hebrews 11:23 NIV*

Now Moses had to have something special about him as a baby, I mean this had to be one cute baby because the daughter of Pharaoh chose to pick him up and raise him as one of her own. Now as Moses grew up he was brought up as an Egyptian noble. He would've had the best education and training afforded to him being as he was the son of Pharaoh's daughter. All things considered, he ended up with a pretty good deal. But despite all of this, Moses still chose to see himself as an Israelite rather than Egyptian.

*"One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, "Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?" The man said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "What I did must have become known.""*

*Exodus 2:11-14 NIV*

After this Pharaoh did find out, and he wasn't too happy. He tries to kill Moses, but Moses was able to flee in time. Moses then settles down in a place called Midian, and finds a wife. And when I say he found a wife, I mean he rested at a well when seven women came to get water. And multiple shepherds came to chase the women off for some reason, but Moses stepped in and single handedly came to their rescue. Now

that's what I call a first date. Later on the Lord would appear to Moses in the famous story of the burning bush and tell him to go back to Egypt and rescue the people of Israel. He gives Moses all of these great signs and wonders to perform so that the people know he is being sent by God. And Moses is like that's great God, but here's the thing, I am not a great speaker and I do not do well with speeches. That's the GIV, Grant Interpretive Version, but you guys get the idea. Now Moses has literally killed a man, and defended a group of girls from shepherds single handedly, but he is too afraid to look foolish speaking in front of people. Some of you in the room are probably, "ehh I could relate." From here we're going to fast forward the story quite a bit. This next part of the story happens after the Israelites are freed from Egypt. Moses has seen God part the Red Sea, bring down ten plagues on Egypt, and provide food for them out of the sky. Moses has been a first hand witness to the power of God. Now at this point Moses and the people of Israel are wandering through the wilderness and they run out of water. The people begin to groan and complain to Moses as they often do through the story, so Moses and his brother Aaron go to pray to God. And God tells Moses to gather all the people together, and speak to this rock and water will come flowing out. It's almost like God is telling Moses after all this time, after all that you've seen, will you finally trust me to speak in front of the people? And for whatever reason Moses, possibly in his anger towards the people complaining or in his continued fear of speaking, chooses to disobey God and strike the rock instead. He strikes the rock twice, and God allows water to still flow out, but it does not come without consequences.

*“But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.””*

*Numbers 20:12 NIV*

It's at this point I begin to wonder just what God saw in Moses. Sure he was great in some ways, but Moses was a murderer. He doubted the power of God and even though God was giving him the power to save the Israelites out of slavery, he was reluctant because he was afraid of speaking. And finally after all the signs, miracles, and wonders Moses had seen, he still chose to disobey and not trust in God. Why did God choose Moses? Surely, he was unworthy of this task.

As I read through the story of the Bible I am constantly reminded that God often chooses to use the most unworthy, and unlikely of people to carry out his mission.

This statement rings so true for the story of Moses. Moses, like us (myself included), was unworthy for the mission. But God still chose to see the redeemable parts of Moses, rather than his brokenness. So what were those qualities that God saw in him that made Him say, I see the brokenness, but I can work with this? Three qualities stick out to me.

1. Moses defended the helpless

- a. Moses didn't grow too comfortable in his luxury of being the son of Pharaoh's daughter that he didn't see the injustice going on around him.
- b. Now I've been up here for awhile, and I feel like we're family. I tell some jokes, you guys give me some pity laughs, I keep going on and on. It's a great relationship. Well I'm going to be vulnerable for a moment. This next story is from my own life and it is truly a Gen z type of story. A couple years ago I went to visit a friend who lives in Chicago. So she sends me here address, pretty standard stuff, all except the address she sends me is also an address in Cincinnati. So when I type in the address to the GPS, it automatically assumes I'm going to the one in Cincinnati. Now a normal person probably would've caught the problem right there, but I am not mere, 'normal' person. So I plug that away, put on a podcast and begin to follow that blue line to the Promised Land. Now again most people, when they began to drive in the opposite direction would've noticed and thought something isn't right. But like I said earlier, not me. I put a lot of faith in that blue line. So I get to the destination, and call her saying I'm here. And she says "what? You're like two hours early." So she goes outside and says "I don't see you, send me your location." So I send it to her, and she says "It says you're in Cincinnati, but that can't be right." This was followed by a few very painful moments of silence as I worked up the courage to tell her that it was indeed right. I knew at this moment that this was going to be something I will never live down among the friend group. Whenever someone asks me for directions now, it's like my friends bust down the



door “Hey! Hey! Do not listen to a word this guy says. He drove to Cincinnati thinking he was on his way to Chicago.” I think about that story a lot, not usually because I want to, often others remind me. And I think about how I was so focused on following that blue line, comfortable in my car listening to that podcast, that I turned on autopilot and didn’t notice the scenery around me that would’ve indicated I’m going in the wrong direction. I didn’t care to look at the many street signs that would’ve told me I’m on my way to Cincinnati and not Chicago. A ridiculous story I know, believe me. But I think oftentimes in our own lives we can do this within life. We can get so focused on our problems, our jobs, our responsibilities, that we don’t take time to look around at what’s going on around us.

- c. *“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.” -Hebrews 11:24-26 NIV*
- d. It didn’t matter if it was an Israelite slave or women from another land that he didn’t even know, Moses chose to defend those who couldn’t defend themselves.
- e. Deepak and Simmi Dhingra are two of our mission partners here at Sherwood Oaks. They were from high cast Hindu-Sikh families in North India. Deepack’s dad was a diplomat with the government. They had very

high status and wealth in North India. When they converted to Christianity, they were rejected by their families, business partners, and neighbors. The persecution forced them to leave their home and move to Australia seeking support from Christians there. Eventually God called them back to their home area to face the persecution and begin working to evangelize people in the lower casts. Their obedience cost them social status, family wealth and resources, and respect from their peers. However, because of their faithfulness a movement began that, to date, has seen more than 21,000 first generation believers come to Christ. Many of the members of these new churches have been persecuted, disgraced, beaten, and some have lost their lives. But the church continues to grow there because of the strong witness of the faithfulness of the Dhingra's and many others, willing to sacrifice status and cultural influence for the Gospel.

## 2. Moses chose hope

- a. Despite all the doubts Moses had about his shortcomings and his speaking ability, he eventually chose hope. Moses wasn't sure that God was going to be able to save the Israelite people from the most powerful nation in the world at that time. Moses grew up in Egypt. He would've known just how powerful they were first hand. And Moses was supposed to lead the Israelites? Last time he tried to intervene in a fight between Israelites and tell them what to do, they went and told Pharaoh he murdered someone. Moses had plenty of reason to doubt this rescue mission. But despite these doubts Moses eventually chose to choose

hope. If there was even a possibility that this God could save my people, then I have to take the chance. So he puts his own life in danger, and gives up everything he's built in this new land on this hope that maybe, this God could actually save his people.

- b. I would say one common theme among all of the heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11 is not what they have in gifts and talents, but what they choose to hope for. Hope for a better world. Hope that restoration can come despite all the brokenness that they experience in their lives. And I believe it is this hope that God chooses to use more in them than any gifts or talents they may have.

### 3. Moses was willing to sacrifice

- a. Yes, Moses was able to save the Israelites out of slavery from Egypt, but it did not come without a price. Moses traded that Egyptian Tempur-Pedic for a bed in the dirt. In his position as an Egyptian noble he would've been well fed, and he traded that to often go hungry. Moses would go on to build two lives, one in Egypt and one in Midian where he was comfortable and content. Moses had a simple life in Midian, he had a wife and family. He built something for himself, and he gave all of that up so that he could save others.

These redeemable qualities that God chose to see in Moses are some of the very same qualities that we see in the character of Jesus. Paul tell us this in Philippians chapter two when talking about Jesus:

*“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!”*

*Philippians 2:6-8 NIV*

Jesus chose to give up his great position with God to become a mere man. Jesus would grow up in a family that wasn't wealthy. He would be beaten, tortured, mocked, and yet he would remain innocent. Enduring all of this so that he might save us. Jesus had hope that he could bring restoration to this broken world, and he laid down the ultimate sacrifice so that we may have life.

Some of you here might feel unworthy. You might feel as though you are the most unlikely person in the world to point people to Jesus. You've messed up time and time again in your life, and you find yourself in a pit that you feel as though you deserve. One of my best friends John McArdle once told me “I think all people fight the struggle of feeling like we aren't worthy of anything, while simultaneously believing we're better than everyone else.” That statement hit me hard because I see that in myself so much. I can look around and see all the faults in other people, and think if people would just be more like me! But then I'm also aware that deep down I am not worthy of anything. I've messed up so many times. I've hurt so many people. I am not worthy of grace. And the truth is I'm right. I am not worthy of forgiveness. I am nothing but a sinner. But for

whatever reason God chooses to love me and give me grace regardless. Grace is just that, it is a gift undeserved.

If you are unworthy, unprepared, unlikely, good. God often chooses to use the most unworthy and unlikely people to carry out His mission. The best part of all of this is we don't have to be. No matter what you've done, no matter what pit you have dug yourself into, God can still pull you up out of there and use you.

I'll end here today with one final story. In the middle school ministry here at Sherwood Oaks we have always tried to emphasize the importance of small groups. I had a small group throughout high school that led to me having lifelong friends that are still some of my closest friends today. So in 2022 I started a 7th grade small group of boys that met together every Tuesday. Many of the guys in the group had grown up together, but one of the 7th graders named Adam was new to that group that year. Which can always be a hard place to be. Well in November of that year, Adam's dad passed away suddenly with a stroke. And suddenly he was faced with the reality of this broken world way too soon. Now I don't know if you guys can remember too much about middle school boys, but empathy and vulnerability are not two of their strong suits. To be honest I don't really know any other people group that would be more unworthy and unlikely to deal with this situation than middle school boys. But the way each of those boys stepped up and loved on Adam was nothing short of a miracle. The way they invited him into their group when they easily could've been worried about their own lives as kids. The way Adam courageously stepped up and shared among his peers that he was not okay, and that

he needed help. The level of courage and vulnerability from Adam was once again, nothing short of a miracle. Now I'm not here to say everything is perfect and it's all sunshine and rainbows now. I don't think Adam would be afraid of telling you that's not the case. But those guys continue to follow the Lord faithfully every day. They continue to support one another and just be brothers in Christ. And I don't know many other examples that demonstrate what the Church should be more than that. Middle school boys living out their faith in a way that reflects the character of Jesus.

So what will you choose to do this week? If you look down the list found in Hebrews 11 you will see that all of what is listed there is faith that is put into action. It isn't just believing, it is choosing to act. Will you defend the helpless this week? Will you choose to hope in the midst of brokenness? Will you choose to sacrifice for the sake of others? If so, it doesn't matter how unworthy or unlikely you are, God can use you. Let the Holy Spirit fill you with His presence and go on a mission to point people to the only real source of hope there is, Jesus. Choose to take a step of faith today.