



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Sunday, August 7-13 (C) – Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Focus: *By Faith!*

word of life

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Hebrews 11:1 (NRSV)

Read Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Several weeks ago, the readings for the appointed second lesson came from the book of Hebrews. The primary focus of those readings was the understanding of Jesus as the perfect high priest who offered for the believer the perfect sacrifice on the cross, giving life and salvation for the believer. The readings for the next three weeks return to Hebrews and emphasize the importance of steadfast faith in the promises of God embodied in Christ, the great high priest. Believers are urged to live with the assurance that God will keep God’s promises, even in circumstances that seem to indicate the contrary. This theme is articulated in the beautiful words that begin and summarize the chapter: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1 NRSV) The believer is encouraged to stand firmly on the promises of God.

1. *How would you define “faith”?*
2. *Note the nouns in this verse: faith, assurance, conviction. How do they relate to one another?*

The prime example of faith for the author of Hebrews is the patriarch Abraham. It was not uncommon for writers to strengthen their argument or thesis by recalling the heroes of the past. Abraham is certainly first in the “Hall of Fame” for faithfulness. The phrase *by faith* becomes the mantra spoken time and again in Hebrews 11:8-16:

vs 8 – *by faith* Abraham obeyed his call to go, not knowing where he was going, only trusting in God to lead and guide. (Genesis 12:1-4.)

vss 9-10 – *by faith* he sojourned in the land as a resident alien, not building a permanent dwelling, but rather living life as a pilgrim on a journey, knowing the promised heavenly city. (Genesis 23:4)

vs 11 – *by faith* Abraham and Sarah experienced the birth of a son Isaac, long after their childbearing years. (Genesis 18:11, 21:3) *By Faith!*

3. *What do you know about Abraham?*
4. *Which one of the above “by faith” statements is the most inspiring to you?*

For the author of Hebrews, Abraham serves as a model for the believer – one who was steadfast; one who lived a life of conviction; one who was obedient to God and God’s calling; one who knew not where he was going, but only faithfully trusted in God’s promises to lead him to his heavenly home. (See Hebrews 11:13-16.)

Abraham lived life in anticipation with the confident assurance in God to travel with him, to lead the way, and to bring blessing and the fulfillment of God’s promises. Even though he did not live to see descendants “as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore,” (Hebrews 11:10 NRSV) he still lived in faithful anticipation of what God had promised. Abraham embodies the seminal verse of this chapter in Hebrews: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1 NRSV)

5. *What can be learned from Abraham?*
6. *How might Hebrews 11:1 help someone?*

word among us

Pastor John knew that the time would someday come. The long-term effects of a chronic illness made it increasingly more and more difficult for him to do the work he was called to do. He finally decided it was time – time to resign his call, not really knowing what was next for his ministry.

As he searched the Scripture for guidance in his decision, Pastor John was drawn to the words of Hebrews 11. The litany of faithful followers throughout Israel's history was compelling. Each example cited began with the words, "by faith." By faith, Moses did as God called him to do. By faith, the people of Israel took that first step through the waters of the Red Sea. By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out, not knowing where he was going, but trusting that God would lead and guide.

1. *How does living "by faith" help when we have to make difficult decisions?*
2. *If someone believed that living "by faith" meant an easy life, how would you respond?*

It's easy to imagine Abraham and Sarah's conversation the day he heard God's call to pull up stakes and go – without a sure destination or even a road map. "Well, Sarah, we're moving." "Where?" "Don't know, but God's got a plan." And so they packed up and moved ... by faith.

We all, at one time or another, wrestle with difficult decisions regarding the future. There are times when we ask, "God, is this what you had in mind for me?" There are times when God's promises seem so far away, so distant, so improbable, so difficult to discern. In times like these, we venture forth ... by faith.

3. *Describe a time in your life when you wrestled with a difficult decision and were able to proceed "by faith."*

Who knows what the future holds? God knows; and God calls us to live faithfully in "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1 NRSV) As Pastor John is known to say, "We may not know what the future holds, but we know Who holds the future." (For more of Pastor John's story, see *Will I Sing Again? Listening for the Melody of Grace in the Silence of Illness and Loss* by John McCullough Bade.)

faith practice in daily life

Live among God's faithful people

It's hard at times to live faithfully – to live with assurance and conviction – to live by faith. The future can seem so uncertain, the present so confusing, the past so cluttered. We need one another. We need the witness and example of other believers who have lived and died *by faith*, trusting in God's promises. We need to be reminded on our journey of life of God's promise to lead and guide. In baptism, we begin a life-long journey of faith. As we live our baptism in community among God's faithful people, we support each other along the way. We learn to live *by faith*.

4. *Think of the heroes of faith in your life or in the church. What characteristics do they have in common with Abraham? What can we learn from them about living "by faith?"*

Prayer

Eternal God, help us to live in the assurance of the hope which is ours through Christ. Empower us to live with conviction, trusting that you are with us, even in times when we cannot see your presence. O God, help us to live *by faith*. Amen

last word

Think of those in your journey of life who have been models of living *by faith*.
Offer a prayer of thanks for them.

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Sunday, August 7-13 (C) Faith Practices Page 2 of 2