

GROUP LEADER GUIDE

Hebrews: Faith Through Ups & Downs

Hebrews 11:11-40



ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- May 9th- 2nd Saturday (Men)
- May 16th- SERVE Saturday (Mobalization)

Check out the TJC Weekend Recap podcast for a more in-depth look at our sermons each week!

The podcast is available on all streaming platforms!

SERMON NOTES

Hebrews 11:13 -- These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

Imagine for a moment you attend two different funerals.

The first is for a woman who lived to be 96-years-old. She had a great marriage, wonderful children, and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She loved the Lord, and taught Sunday school for decades. She sang in the choir. She worked and enjoyed the people she worked with and they all loved her. She had great health the majority of her life.

The second is of a young man who lived to be 15-years-old. He had great difficulties. He spent a lot of time in the hospital and doctor's offices because of health issues. His final two years were incredibly difficult, filled with physical pain and loss of use of most of physical body.

At both funerals, the pastor says that these two individuals lived beautiful, incredible lives of faith. Both are examples of real faith lived out in the world. And I know the pastor would say that because I was the pastor at both of those funerals, one belonged to my grandmother and the other my son.

You see, in our world today, from the outside looking in, that seems backwards. We assume the first life proves faith "pays off." Why? Because we measure faithfulness by the scoreboard. But the Scriptures don't play by that rule. In Hebrews 11, verses 11–40, the author deliberately places two kinds of stories side by side. He recalls the saints of old that tore down walls, routed armies, and escaped the sword. And he highlights that others were tortured, mocked, scattered.

Today we're going to see that *true faith endures through both triumph and tragedy because it is anchored in God's promises, not in immediate earthly outcomes*. The name of my sermon is: Faith Through Ups and Downs.

Scripture Exegesis: Hebrews 11:11-40

Hebrews 11:11–40 is often called "The Hall of Faith." The author builds you up: victory, miracles, deliverance... and you're thinking, "Yes, that's what faith produces."

And then, boom, everything changes. Others were tortured. Others were mocked. Others were killed. And the author doesn't say, "You see, because they had less faith. Quite the opposite. He says, "They had the same faith."

The author's point is that the defining mark of biblical faith is not whether God rescues you from hardship or allows you to suffer for it. The defining mark is that genuine trust in God perseveres regardless of the circumstance. Both the conqueror and the martyr shared the same conviction: they were looking forward to "a better country, that is, a heavenly one" (v. 16) and the ultimate perfection that God provides "something better" in Christ (v. 40). Their faith did not waver because it was fixed on God's eternal character and His covenant promises, rather than the temporary relief or pain of their present reality.

The point isn't that one group had more faith than the other. It's that *neither* group saw the ultimate fulfillment in their lifetime. They were all looking toward the same horizon, which is the perfection brought about by Christ's finished work.

Some of us are living in vs 33 right now, things are good. We feel like things are falling in place and going our way. And others are living in vs 37. The struggle bus is real. You can't seem to catch a break. Your health issues persist. You can't stand the job but don't know what the next step is. You struggle with trust in the Lord. And here's the deal...enduring day-by-day, looking to the Lord, both types of people are celebrated for their lives of faith.

There are two big theological foundations embedded in this text for us to grasp and personalize into our understanding:

I. Faith's Future-Orientation

The word "eschatological" is just a big fancy theology word for "the end of the age" or "the future end of history." Hebrews 11 dismantles the idea that biblical faith is a transaction for merely current temporal blessings. The author deliberately stacks victory stories alongside martyrdom accounts to prove that genuine faith is oriented toward the age to come. The saints in this passage didn't trust God for just immediate comfort. They trusted His covenant promise of future glory despite delayed fulfillment. This anchors in the doctrine that God's people live in the tension of the already/not yet.

Our hope is secured in Christ (ALREADY), but its full consummation awaits His return (NOT YET). We are to walk by faith today, and seek the face of God today, knowing we walk in His blessing, and knowing that this life matters (ALREADY), while recognizing that this world still awaits redemption and renewal and is not as it will be (NOT YET). So our faith is the steady gaze toward what God has sworn to complete, even when the present chapter feels unresolved.

Faith has to stand with an eye on the future.

STORY: I met with a sweet couple recently that lost a young son very suddenly and unexpectedly. We spent time crying together and talking about navigating the grief. They are strong believers. And we, together, talked about the promises of God that await us when Christ returns and makes all things new. Our present faith, in the midst of hardship and suffering, is oriented in the future.

II. Christ is the "Something Better"

Verses 39-40 are the theological crux of the text: though commended for their faith, they did not receive what was promised, because *God had prepared something better*. This is a statement about redemptive history. The patriarchs, prophets, and martyrs looked forward to the Messiah. That was the promise they held to. We look back to Him in accomplished reality. Their faith and ours converge in the same Person -- Jesus. This reinforces the doctrine that salvation has always been by grace through faith in the promised Seed of Abraham, who is

Jesus. The “better” thing is the inaugurated new covenant, where Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice, resurrection, and heavenly intercession perfects what the old covenant could only foreshadow.

Application:

1. Stop measuring God's pleasure by immediate outcomes.

Some of you right now are watching God move in visible ways that are exciting in your lives. Others of you are praying for breakthroughs that haven't come yet. Friends, remember: your faithfulness is not validated by the presence or absence of visible results. Whether God delivers you *from* suffering or sustains *through* suffering, the requirement remains the same: keep walking in obedience to His Word. Stop assuming an unanswered prayer means you're doing something displeasing to God.

Single mom: you're doing everything you can to raise your kids faithfully, and it still feels chaotic. That doesn't mean God is displeased with you.

Young man: you're trying to follow Christ, but your life doesn't look as successful as your peers. That's not a sign of failure.

Older couple: you prayed for things that never happened. Or maybe you still have a list of things you want to do longer than the time or money you have to do it. That doesn't mean your life was wasted.

Faithfulness is not measured by what shows up on the scoreboard of your life.

2. Anchor your endurance in what Christ has already secured.

When trials or struggles drag on, the temptation is to doubt God's goodness or abandon hope. If you are in Christ, you already possess the "something better." Jesus' finished work means your sins are covered, your adoption is sealed, and your eternal salvation is fixed. Suffering does not negate God's love toward you. It refines it. Preach the gospel and the promises of God to yourselves in hard seasons. Your present pain does not mean you've fallen outside God's covenant care.

You don't wake up every day and check your circumstances to see if God loves you. You look to the cross, where He already proved it.

3. Live with an exile's posture in your ordinary spheres.

Hebrews 11:13 says these saints "acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth." This translates directly into how you approach work, family, and life in the public square. Whether you are pouring concrete, managing a household, sitting on a board, or leading a ministry team, your primary citizenship is in Christ's kingdom. This frees you from needing your workplace, neighborhood, or church to perfectly satisfy your deepest longings. We can work with integrity, love our enemies, and steward our time and resources as ambassadors of Christ's Kingdom, as stewards, with joyful hearts as fix our eyes on the promises we have today and tomorrow.

This changes how you go to work Monday morning. You don't need your boss to validate you...you already belong to Christ.

This changes how you parent. You're not raising perfect kids...you're raising eternal souls.

This changes how you suffer. You don't panic when life breaks...you remember this isn't the end of the story.

4. Obey for the sake of those who come after you.

Hebrews 11 is an amazing testimony of saints that went before us. But their examples help us in our faith. This is why each year we do a series called "The Cloud" and we look at Christians throughout history that help us walk faithfully in our lives. Spiritual inheritance is real. But in the same way those who have gone before us

have an impact on our lives, we have an impact on the coming generations after us. The prayers a grandmother has prayed, the integrity a father has modeled, the quiet service a volunteer has poured into a Sunday school class all compound in the lives of the next generation. We should view our current obedience, especially the unseen and uncelebrated kind, as sowing into the spiritual soil of those who will stand after us. Your faithfulness today may be the very bridge someone else walks across to find Christ tomorrow.

Some of the most important things you will ever do for the Kingdom will never trend, never go viral, and never even be noticed in your lifetime. There is a day where the people who attend this church don't even know who Erik Reed even is. That's reality. TJC will be their church. And my name, even if it is remembered at all, will not mean much in the day-to-day lives of those who come here. And that's okay. I still want us to obey today, for their sakes. I want us to believe great things and attempt great things, for their sake.

Close:

I want to close by pulling this all together. The line of thinking concludes in vs 39-40: **And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.**

What does he mean by "apart from us they should not be made perfect"?

The old-covenant saints (Abraham, Moses, the prophets) trusted God's promise in shadow form. The atoning blood of Christ had not yet been shed yet. But they had faith that God was sending the Messiah to save. And they believed.

The new-covenant believers (those after the cross/us) now possess the "something better." We have:

- a once-for-all sacrifice
- direct access to the heavenly sanctuary
- the indwelling Spirit

But we all (both the old and new) are still awaiting something together: our bodily resurrection (1 Cor. 15:51-53). God ordained that the final perfection (bodily resurrection and public vindication) will happen simultaneously for the whole people of God. Abraham will not finish the race a moment ahead of the newest convert at TJC. The family crosses the line together.

PRAY

- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you grow in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you go to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?
- What is a sin you have been struggling with that you need to repent of



DISCUSS:

1: Faith Beyond the Scoreboard – Read: Hebrews 11:13

Question: Why is it tempting to measure our faith only by the visible “successes” in our lives? Why is it important that Scripture reshapes how we define faithfulness?

Leader Note: Press the contrast between worldly metrics (results, comfort, success) and biblical faithfulness. Faith is not validated by outcomes.

2: Triumph and Tragedy – Read: Hebrews 11:32–38

Question: If faithfulness is not determined by outcomes, what might God be doing in seasons of triumph that is different from what He is doing in seasons of suffering?

Leader Note: This is central. Same faith, different circumstances. God forms us in both—but often in different ways. Faith is anchored in Him, not outcomes.

3: Living in the “Already / Not Yet” – Read: Hebrews 11:13; Hebrews 10:36

Question: How would you explain the “already but not yet” tension to a new believer? What are some real-life examples that reflect this tension today?

Leader Note: Help them embrace tension. Christianity is not immediate fulfillment—it’s faithful waiting.

4: When Life Feels Uneven – Read: Hebrews 11:33 vs 11:37

Question: How do we guard against comparing our lives to others when their “faith story” looks different than ours? What are the dangers if we don’t?

Leader Note: Comparison breeds confusion. God’s faithfulness is not measured by identical outcomes.

5: Living as Strangers and Exiles – Read: Hebrews 11:13

Question: What does it look like practically to live as an “exile” in your everyday life (work, family, decisions)? How does this shape both seasons of triumph and difficulty?

Leader Note: This is about identity. We belong to another kingdom, which reshapes priorities and expectations.

6: Faith for the Next Generation – Read: Hebrews 11 (whole chapter theme)

Question: How can your faithfulness today impact those who come after you, even if you never see the results? How do we stay mindful that our faith is generational?

Leader Note: End with legacy. Faith is not just personal—it's generational. Obedience today shapes future faith.



- **BUILD UP | SEND OUT**

- How are you making yourself known at church this week?
- How are you growing to know Christ better this week?
- How are you making Christ known this week?

- **PRAYER**

- **Pray over any request from your group members.**
- **Pray for our team:** Laurie Diccico- Director Kid's Ministry
- **Pray for our short-term teams:**
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- **Pray for our long-term units on the mission field:**
 - The Wilsons
 - The Grays
 - The Browns
- **Pray for the unreached.** Want to keep up with Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>