

Hebrews 11:5-7 "Living By Faith"—part two**

Main Idea: In Hebrews 11:5-7, we see faith put on display in the lives of two people whose example should motivate us to live by faith.

Definition: Faith is trusting in the person of God and acting on the promises of God regardless how I feel.

I. We see faith displayed by looking at Enoch (5-6).

A. He was taken by God (5a).

1. Something similar happened to Elijah.
2. Something similar will happen when Christ returns.

B. He was commended by God (5b).

1. The goal isn't a long life.
2. The goal is to live a life that brings pleasure to God.

C. He shows us what pleases God (6).

1. We must believe that God is.
2. We must believe that God rewards the earnest seeker.

II. We see faith displayed by looking at Noah (7).

A. He believed God's warning.

1. People living by faith don't live for the present.
2. People living by faith take God at His Word.

B. He acted upon God's provision of salvation.

1. To escape judgment he entered the ark.
2. To escape judgment we must come to the cross.

C. He agreed with God's assessment of the world.

1. We must not love what is destined to perish.
2. We must love those things which will matter for eternity.

D. He became an heir of righteousness.

1. There's no greater treasure than righteousness.
2. It can be yours by faith alone.

Make It Personal: Am I putting faith on display in my life?

In his book, *Living Water*, Brother Yun, a Chinese preacher and evangelist who himself has endured much persecution, shares what happened back in the 1980's in the Henan Province of China:

In 1982 the house churches in my home province of Henan decided to send a team of seventeen evangelists to eastern Sichuan Province. After arriving, they spread out to different counties. In the first month God did many wonderful works and revival broke out. The local authorities were furious to find the gospel being proclaimed in their area and initiated a severe crackdown. Thirteen of the evangelists were arrested, badly beaten and sent back to Henan.

One of the evangelists, Brother Wang, managed to escape. He hurried back to Henan, alerted the church to the arrests and described the brutal beatings each member of the team had received. Many had suffered broken bones. When a group of five local believers went to the train station to welcome the injured evangelists home, they were arrested and cruelly beaten at the police station. Their heads were smashed, and bruises covered every part of their bodies. The police tied them up in an inhumane manner and subjected them to additional abuses with dreaded electric batons.

The Christians didn't harbor any resentment or bitterness towards their persecutors at all. Indeed, they thanked God for the great privilege of partaking in the 'fellowship of sharing in his sufferings' (Phil. 3:10). They rejoiced 'because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name' (Acts 5:41). They felt sorry for the men who had carried out these tortures, and prayed fervently for them.

When the believers in Henan heard that so many evangelists had been arrested and severely injured, many immediately volunteered to go to Sichuan in their place. These replacement evangelists were also arrested and sent back to Henan covered in their own blood and bruises. The response of the church was to send yet more workers. Finally, after much suffering, there was a spiritual breakthrough and a strong body of believers emerged in eastern Sichuan. Revival broke out in several areas, and today there are tens of thousands of Christians where there had previously been none.

The sacrifice was worth it.[\[1\]](#)

I'm humbled when I hear accounts like that, aren't you? When I hear how our brothers and sisters in Christ are willing to suffer and die, if necessary, to make Christ known to those who don't know Him, I'm challenged by their faith and by my need to show the reality of my faith in Christ.

Last week I gave you a working definition of faith. Have you memorized it?

Definition: Faith is trusting in the person of God and acting on the promises of God regardless how I feel.

That's what our brothers in the Henan province did. They trusted in the person of God and acted on the promises of God, regardless of how they felt. To use Hebrews 11:1 terminology, they were sure of what they hoped for and confident of what they could not see (the fulfillment of Christ's promise to use their witness to bring people to Himself). That's faith. Faith is doing what God wants you to do, enabled by His grace, no matter what the cost.

For these Chinese brothers, to live by faith meant they must not give in to the persecution. We don't face outright persecution in our country, not yet anyway. But we do face an obstacle, a sly, crafty one, and in some ways it's even more disruptive to the work of Christ. They faced persecution. We face distraction. Both can sideline a believer.

Let me give you an example. We're in the middle of March Madness. Did you spend more time studying your Bible or your brackets this week, praying or watching players this week, talking with friends about their need for Christ or talking with them about their need to pick a different final four team? Don't take me wrong. I love sports, especially basketball. But living by faith means I must daily, even moment by moment, put basketball (and everything else) in its proper place. Seek first the kingdom of God. I'm in

trouble when bracketology becomes more important to me than Christology.

It's not easy to live by faith. That's one of the reasons we need examples who can motivate us. Thankfully, God has given us Hebrews 11. The structure of Hebrews 11 is quite simple. In verse 1, we see faith defined. In verses 2-40, we see faith displayed.

As we began to see last time, we can see faith in action by looking at God's people in the past, at "the ancients" (2). We see it by affirming the creation account (3). And we see it by looking at Abel (4).

This morning, as we turn to Hebrews 11:5-7, we'll see faith put on display in the lives of two people whose examples can teach and inspire us to live by faith.

I. We see faith displayed by looking at Enoch (5-6).

Verse 5 states, "By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God."

Keep in mind the first readers of this letter were Jewish Christians. Due to persecution, some were struggling, even considering going back to their old beliefs and practices in Judaism. To show how unthinkable defection would be, the writer took the first seven chapters to show the superiority of Christ: to angels, to Moses, and to the priests of Aaron. In chapters 8-10, he demonstrated the superiority of Christ's sacrificial work. Now it's crunch time. "You need to persevere," he told them in 10:36. "You need to do what God's people have always done if you want to receive what He has promised."

You need to do what Enoch did. Enoch, whom we read about in Genesis 5, was the son of Jared and the father of Methuselah. In order to appreciate what the writer of Hebrews says about Enoch, we need to take a close look at the Genesis account, for the first readers knew it well.

Listen to Genesis 5:21-24, "When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away."

Enoch walked with God. Please realize that Enoch didn't always walk with God. No one does. He was just like us. He was born a sinner, cut off from God—and unregenerate sinners don't walk with God.

I've asked a lot of people the following question, "How long have you been a Christian?" More than once I've received the reply, "Oh, I don't know. I guess I've always been a Christian."

But that's impossible, isn't it? Why? Because the Bible says we are born into the world as sinful, depraved creatures. What does that mean? Genesis 6:5 explains, "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was *only evil all the time*." Every inclination, only evil, all the time. That's what depravity means. No man seeks God for from birth every inclination of his heart is to go *away* from God. In Genesis 8:21 God Himself makes this assessment of mankind, "Every inclination of his heart is evil *from childhood*."^[2]

No, Enoch didn't always walk with God. As a descendant of Adam, he was born in sin and just like we are. He inherited a sin nature just like we do. And then came a day when his life changed, when Enoch put his faith in God and started walking with God.

When did it happen? Apparently, he started when he became a father. Verse 21 indicates that Enoch was sixty-five years old when God gave him a son, a boy he named Methuselah. And notice the wording of verse 22, "And *after* he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God."

So when did Enoch begin to walk with God? The Hebrew text is fluid, so I wouldn't die for this point,

but it seems to indicate that Enoch began to walk with God soon *after* he became a father. God has a lot of ways to get a sinner's attention, and parenthood is one of them!

I've seen this myself. When a person becomes a parent, all of a sudden they begin to think seriously about God, perhaps for the first time in their life. Why? Because as they look into the cradle they become overwhelmed with a sense of their newfound responsibility. And their *inadequacy*!

"Whoa! I'm responsible to raise this baby in this world?! I can't do it! I'm insufficient! I need help!" And thankfully, help is available, the very help of the Creator Himself.

So at the age of sixty-five, Enoch acknowledged his sin and need, put His faith in the Living God, and started walking with God. Now look again at Hebrews 11. According to the account in Hebrews what happened to Enoch? The writer highlights three things.

A. He was taken by God (5a). In fact, the writer stresses this point three times in verse 5. "By faith Enoch *was taken* from this life...he could not be found because God *had taken him away*. For before *he was taken* he was commended."

Ray Stedman shares the account of the little girl who was telling her mother the story of Enoch. She said, "Enoch used to take long walks with God. One day he walked so far God said, 'It's too far to go back; come on home with me.'" That is what happened to Enoch.

The Greek verb, *metatithemai*, means "to transfer, to change from one state to another." For instance, the writer used the same root word in Hebrews 7:12 when he wrote, "For when there is a *change* of the priesthood, there must also be a *change* of the law." In our text the verb is passive, indicating this action happened to Enoch. He *was changed*. He *was taken*.

He wouldn't be the last, for...

1. *Something similar happened to Elijah.* You can read about it in 2 Kings 2. Like Enoch, Elijah was a man of God. One day the prophet took a walk with his successor, Elisha. 2 Kings 2:11-12 tells us what happened, "As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw this and cried out, 'My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!' And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them apart."

Did it happen that way for Enoch? I don't know. But I know this...

2. *Something similar will happen when Christ returns.* We might say that Enoch is a prototype of what's going to happen to God's people who are living when the event known as the "rapture" occurs. Paul explains in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17:

"According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."

Enoch didn't die, but rather God took him. The same will happen to all who know Christ who are living when Christ returns. Beloved, that event could happen today. And if you know Christ, you will not die, but will pass directly from this life into the presence of the Lord. If you do not know Christ, you will be left behind and enter into the horrendous phase of history the Bible calls the Tribulation.

Here's a key question. What's the prerequisite for being taken? Look again at our text. "*By faith* Enoch was taken from this life." The prerequisite is *faith*. Enoch believed God and manifested his belief in God by walking with God.

By the way, Hebrews 11 is showing us that living by faith doesn't produce cookie-cutter results. Abel

lived by faith and was murdered. Enoch lived by faith and was transferred to heaven without dying. And before that, this occurred...

B. He was commended by God (5b). Notice the end of verse 5, "For before he was taken he was commended as one who pleased God." Is there any higher commendation than this, than to have God say He is pleased with you? That's what Paul said he was living for in 2 Corinthians 5:9, "So we make it our goal to please Him."

Notice the connection between pleasing God and walking with God. The Genesis account says he "walked with God." Hebrews 11 says he "pleased God." As Philip Hughes explains, "The Septuagint, which our author echoes, has 'he pleased God' instead of 'he walked with God'; but this is not to say something different, since only he who pleases God walks with God, that is, enjoys a relationship of harmonious fellowship with him."^[3]

It's noteworthy that when you trace Adam's descendants through Cain, at the seventh generation you find a man named Lamech. Lamech was the epitome of ungodliness (Gen 4:23-24). Conversely, Enoch was the seventh generation of Adam through Seth. Godliness culminated with Enoch.

Notice again the sequence. God commended Enoch. And then, when Enoch was 365 years old, God took him. One day Enoch was walking with God in this life, and the next day "he was not" (as the KJV puts it).

Is that a good thing? Is it a good thing when a person leaves this world prematurely? You say, "Well, Enoch did live 365 years. That's a long time." Compared to what? Not compared to his contemporaries. Enoch's father lived to be 962, and his son lived to be 969. Enoch left this world before he reached *half* the ordinary age of his day.

Enoch walked with God, and then he was no more. In fact, the text says "he could not be found," indicating, I think, that they looked for him. Think of the implications. Methuselah lost his dad. Mrs. Enoch lost her mate. Jared lost his son. Mahalalel lost his grandson. Do you think they felt the loss? Do you think they wrestled with the question, "Why? Why did God take our beloved Enoch in the prime of his life?"^[4]

It's a matter of perspective, isn't it? We're prone to think, "I've got a right to live so many years," or "I've got a right to have my family members so many years." But that's not the assessment of a person living by faith. Take Enoch, for example...

1. *The goal isn't a long life.* Rather...

2. *The goal is to live a life that brings pleasure to God.* The apostle James died before he was 40. The missionary David Brainherd died at the age of 29. Jim Elliot was about the same age when he was martyred. Indeed, our Savior lived but 33 years, and then he gave His life.

A successful life isn't necessarily a long life. It's a life that honors God, and that should be our goal. Because Enoch walked with God, God commended him and then took him home to heaven. And we need to learn from Enoch., says the writer of Hebrews, namely this...

C. He shows us what pleases God (6). "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

And without faith, says the writer. Enoch was commended and taken because of his faith. Enoch pleased God because of his faith. And without faith *it is impossible to please God*, not just for Enoch, but for us. It is impossible to please God without putting your faith in Him. That means that the unsaved person who does a lot of good deeds for his family and community, but refuses to put His faith in Jesus Christ, does not please God. That also means that the saved person who refuses to come out of his comfort zone and live by faith is not pleasing God.

The writer says that *anyone who comes to God*. What does he have in mind when he talks about

“coming to God”? Is he talking about a person coming to God in a church worship service on the Lord’s Day? Yes, that’s certainly included, but this is broader. The person that pleases God is the person who, in faith, is constantly *coming to God*. He comes to God in his own daily Bible study and prayer time. He comes to God when he’s working or at school and faces a challenge. He comes to God when he’s giving counsel to his kids in his living room. Like Enoch, he comes to God all the time because he is walking with God.

And when he comes to God, he comes *believing*. And what specifically does he believe? There’s a content to his faith, says our text. This is so practical, so let’s make it personal. When we come to God, if we’re to please Him, we must come believing two things.

1. *We must believe that God is.* That’s the literal reading of the text, to believe that “He is.” God is who He is. We would not know Him had He not taken the initiative to reveal Himself, through general revelation (creation), and through special revelation (His Word, and ultimately His Son). So when we come to God we must believe that He *is*.

You say, “No problem. I believe that God exists. I’m not an atheist.” Really? Last week, I took off early Tuesday morning to drive to an ABWE board meeting. It was foggy, so I had to slow down, and I found myself getting anxious. *I’m going to be late. I can’t afford for this fog to continue.* Answer this. In that moment was I acting like I believe that God is? No. I was acting like a practical atheist. Do you ever do that? Do you ever act like God isn’t there? In order to please Him we must believe that He *is*.

2. *We must believe that God rewards the earnest seeker.* As the KJV puts it, “He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” The author uses the same verb in 12:17, where speaking of Esau, says, “He *sought* the blessing with tears.” Remember Esau? He sold his inheritance rights for a bowl of stew and later lost his blessing as the firstborn due to Jacob’s trickery. So he went to his dad and pleaded with him. He *sought* the blessing with tears. That’s our word, and that’s the kind of seeking that we should exhibit when we come to God.

Our God loves the earnest seeker. Our God rewards the earnest seeker. And when we come to Him, we must believe that.

Some would use this text to support a man-centered, merit-based approach to God. That is, if you do enough for God, then God will reward you. But nothing could be further from the truth, for whatever we might “do for God” is made possible only by what He has done for us. Paul made that clear in 1 Corinthians 4:7, “For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?”

The reformer, Martin Bucer, explains, “When God rewards our good works he is rewarding his works and gifts in us, rather than our works.”^[5] Or, as Augustine put it, “It is his own gifts that God crowns, not our merits.”^[6]

By the way, what’s the reward? God rewards those who seek Him, yes, but *with what*? The reward is God Himself. There is no greater reward. God gives Himself to those who seek Him, and there’s nothing a person who lives by faith wants more than that. Just ask Enoch.

II. We see faith displayed by looking at Noah (7).

We read in verse 7, “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.”

Unlike Enoch of whom we have but a few verses in Genesis, for Noah we have several chapters. From this, the writer of Hebrews highlights four things about Noah.

A. He believed God’s warning. “By faith Noah, *when warned about things not yet seen.*” You

know the story. The Genesis 6 world was evil, so evil that God purposed to wipe mankind from the face of the earth. But Noah found grace in His eyes. Interestingly, Genesis 6:9 says that Noah, like Enoch, “walked with God.”

“I’m going to put an end to all people,” the Lord told Noah. “I’m going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life. But I’m going to establish my covenant with you, Noah. So build an ark, and I’ll save you and your family.”

Just think how ludicrous Noah appeared. He must have been the talk of the town, beyond that, the talk of the country because this kind of news spreads. There was no body of water in sight, yet Noah started building a massive boat. A boat? What’s a boat? Had anyone ever seen a boat before? And why a boat? Because it’s going to rain, he said. Rain? What’s rain? And why is it going to rain? Because God is going to flood and destroy the world because of its wickedness. Flood? What’s a flood? And God’s going to judge the world? No way. He’s a loving God. Noah, you’re out of your mind! Take a chill pill, Noah, and eat, drink, and be merry with the rest of us.

But Noah believed God’s warning. That’s because...

1. *People living by faith don’t live for the present.* Oh, they live *in* the present (they’re not pie in the sky sort of people), but not *for* it. That’s because...

2. *People living by faith take God at His Word.* When God says something, they take it to heart. They trust its validity. They believe it and act upon it. Remember our definition. They trust in the person of God and act on the promises of God, regardless how they feel.

Noah’s example would have encouraged the first readers of Hebrews immensely, for like Noah they too were facing intense ridicule and pressure.

“Why do you believe in this Jesus?” their unsaved family members scoffed. “Don’t you know people are talking about you? They think you’ve gone crazy. And don’t you know your business is going bankrupt if you don’t come to your senses, because no one is going to come to your shop as long as you believe the way you believe.”

You’re not alone, says the writer. The world accused Noah of being a madman too, but he didn’t cave, and for 120 years he kept building and preaching in the face of merciless mocking. What kept him going? The same thing that will keep you going? He believed God’s warning. Secondly...

B. He acted upon God’s provision of salvation. Notice verse 7 again, “By faith, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear *built an ark* to save his family.” Because Noah believed God he did what God told him to do. He built an ark, no small task to say the least. He constructed a boat nearly three times the length of this church building (it was 450 feet long), without the use of power tools. And our text says he built the ark “in holy fear,” which indicates Noah was marked by “spiritual seriousness,” to borrow a description from Robert Gromacki.^[7]

But he didn’t just build the ark. As you well know...

1. *To escape judgment he entered the ark.* He walked up the plank, along with his family members, and got inside that place of safety. Everyone outside the ark perished. Everyone. Remember, Noah warned the people of their need to repent. He’s called “a preacher of righteousness” in 2 Peter 2:5. But no one believed him. Only eight people—Noah, his wife, their three sons, and their wives—only eight people out of a world of an estimated 80 million people survived, because those eight people alone entered the means of deliverance God provided.

There’s a lesson here that we must not miss.

2. *To escape judgment we must come to the cross.* Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:18, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Paul preached the cross because he knew that the cross of Jesus is the ark of safety.

Those who come to it in faith are pardoned of the penalty of their sins because Jesus already endured the penalty in their place (see 1 Pet. 3:20-22). Those who don't come to the cross perish, for Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me (John 14:6)."

There's another detail we mustn't miss. Our text says that Noah built the ark *to save his family* (the KJV says he "prepared an ark to the saving of his house"). That's because people who truly believe God are concerned not only for their own salvation, but for the salvation of those around them, starting with their families. Have you warned your family members of the coming judgment and pleaded with them to enter the ark while the door is open?

C. He agreed with God's assessment of the world. Verse 7 says, "By faith he condemned the world." What does that mean? How did Noah condemn the world? I take that to mean that He agreed with God's assessment. God said that the world is evil and worthy of judgment. And Noah agreed. Noah "condemned" the world, the verb *katakrino* meaning "to judge someone as definitely guilty and thus subject to punishment." Noah knew the world deserved what God said was coming. He knew *he* deserved what was coming, but found grace in God's eyes, unmerited favor, whereby he was spared from the judgment to come.

Noah's not alone, brothers and sisters, for as Leon Morris has observed, "Upright conduct will always stand in condemnation of wickedness."^[8] (see Matt. 12:41-42) We, too, need to agree with God's assessment of the world. That means...

1. *We must not love what is destined to perish.* "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world," says 1 John 2:15. In order to build that ark, Noah had to choose *not* to do some other things with his time and money, right? He couldn't build an ark *and* build a palace for himself, or build an impressive resume, or build a collection of toys. No, why build those things if they're going to perish?

Beloved, let's not love and live for things that are destined to perish. Instead...

2. *We must love those things which will matter for eternity.* What will be important to you one hundred years from now? Christ will. Christ's people will. Christ's word will. Christ's work will. Then make sure they're important now.

So what happened to Noah? What was the reward he received for believing that God exists and earnestly seeking to please Him? The writer of Hebrews tells us...

D. He became an heir of righteousness. Specifically, he became "heir of the righteousness that comes by faith." For people who have not found grace in the eyes of God, as had Noah, that doesn't sound like much of an inheritance. "You mean Noah endured the world's wrath, and all he got out of it was *righteousness*? Sounds like he got gypped." But the fact is...

1. *There's no greater treasure than righteousness.* "Seek first the kingdom of God and His *righteousness*," said Jesus, "and all these things will be added to you (Matt. 6:33)." Righteousness is the key, my friend. Without righteousness, no one will see God. Without righteousness, we perish, for a holy God cannot allow unrighteous people into His holy presence.

You say, "How then? How can I, an unrighteous person, get this righteousness?" The same way Noah did...

2. *It can be yours by faith alone.* It's righteousness "that comes by faith." As Paul explains in Romans 3:22, "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."

Did you realize that Noah is the first man in the Bible to be called "righteous"? As Leon Morris explains, "He was right with God because he took God at his word; he believed what God said and acted on it."^[9] That's what living by faith is all about.

I began this message by sharing the account of our Chinese brothers who suffered incredibly in the Henan province. They didn't give in to the persecution but demonstrated the reality of their faith by

enduring, by persevering, no matter the cost. They chose to live, not for what they could see, but for the unseen. They chose to live by faith.

So how is it in your life? Ask yourself this important question...

Make It Personal: Am I putting faith on display in my life?

Are my kids seeing it? How about the people I work with? My neighbors? And most importantly, how about God Himself? Without faith it is impossible to please God.

Next week: "Faith on Display in the Life of Abraham"

****Note:** This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] Brother Yun, *Living Water*, pp. 233-4.

[2] Contrary to popular thinking, sin infects us from birth. Listen to David's confession in Psalm 51:5, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." And in Psalm 58:3, "Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies."

[3] Philip Hughes, p. 457.

[4] By the way, if there are no gaps in the genealogy, then Seth was still alive when God took Enoch. In fact, all of Enoch's ancestors listed in Genesis 5 were still alive, except for Adam who died 57 years before Enoch's departure.

[5] Martin Bucer; quote taken from Philip Hughes, p. 461.

[6] Quote taken from Philip Hughes, p. 462.

[7] Robert Gromacki, p. 186.

[8] Leon Morris, p. 116.

[9] Leon Morris, p. 116.