

# **faith defined**

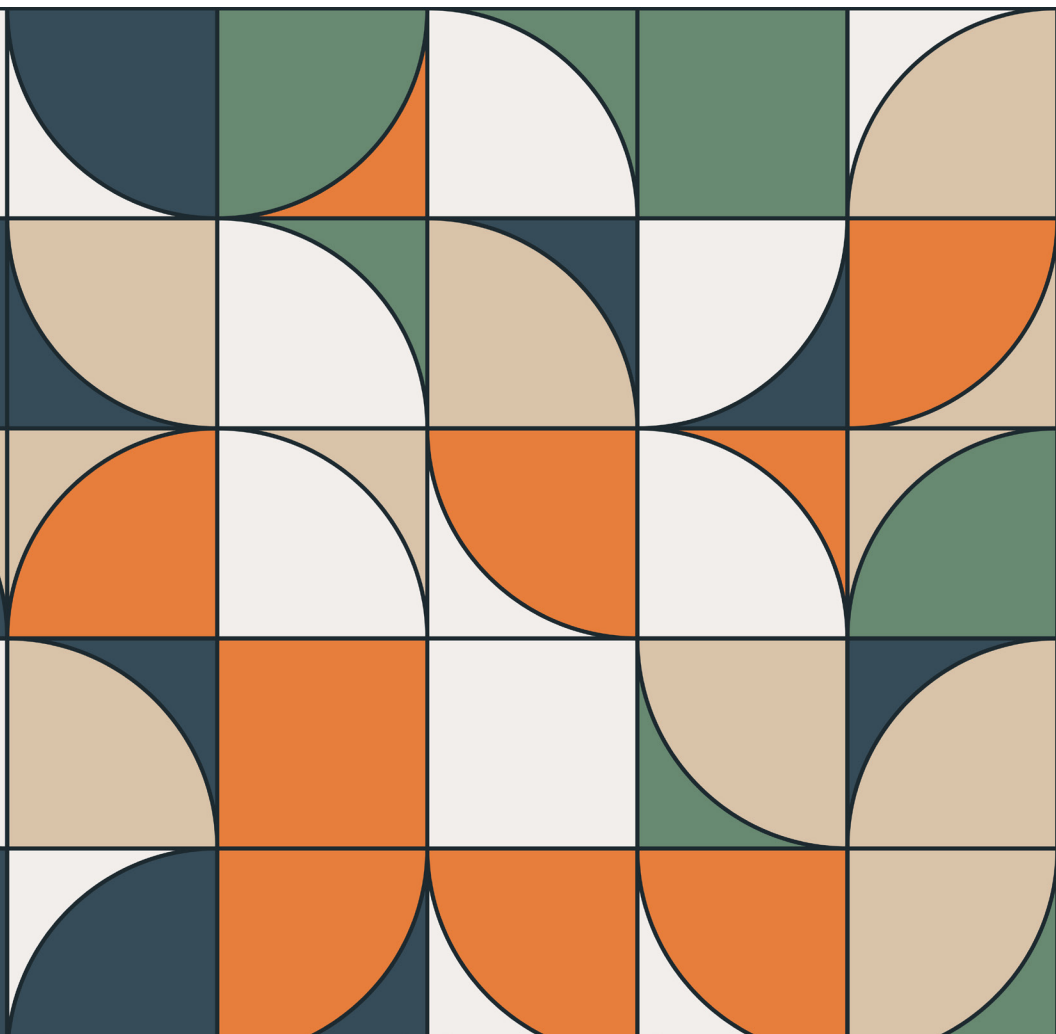
**the book of hebrews**

**hebrews 11**  
**small group guide**



# discussion guide

*small group discussion*



# Week 1 - Faith Begins in Relationship to Christ

*Hebrews 11:1-3 - Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.*

## Principle

Faith isn't about having all the answers; it's about having a relationship with Jesus.

## Gather

1. Can you recall a time when you relied on something or someone you couldn't see, hear, or touch at that moment, but their influence stayed with you and served to guide you to make a decision?
2. Rate your faith on a scale from 1 to 10 (1 = low, 10 = high). Where would your faith stand today, and why?

## Discuss

1. Re-read Heb. 11:1. How does biblical faith (faith in Christ) differ from simple optimism?
2. Faith is the assurance (or "substance") of things hoped for. How would you explain this concept to a first-grade child?
3. Faith is the conviction (or "legal evidence") of things not seen. How would you explain this to someone who does not follow Christ?
4. Re-read Heb. 11:2. In the Old Testament, people of faith received commendation (approval) from God. Who is one of your favorite Old Testament figures who stepped out in faith, and why does their story resonate with you?

5. Read Heb. 11:3 and Col. 1:15-20. Christians believe that God created all things by faith. Why is believing in God as Creator and Sustainer essential to the Christian faith?
6. 2 Cor. 5:7 says we walk by faith, not by sight. Read Rev. 21:1-4. What is the ultimate outcome of our faith?

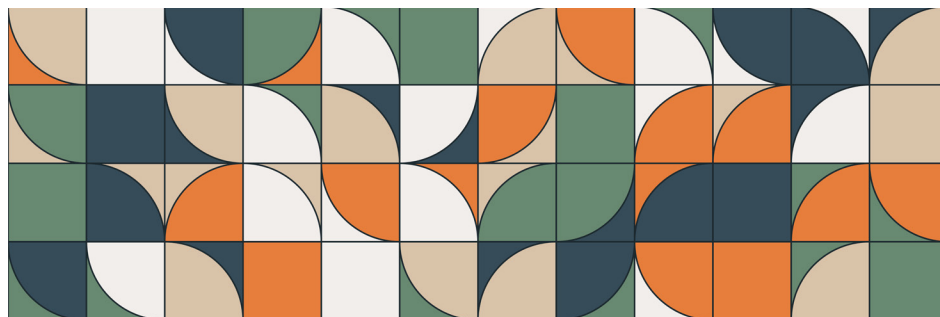
## Apply

1. In what ways has faith helped you turn away from seeking approval from others and instead pursue God's approval?
2. How can we guard against making faith a checklist and knowing answers rather than pursuing a genuine relationship with Christ?

## Further

Here at the start of this series, we recommend beginning a Faith Journal to capture your thoughts, concerns, questions, and steps of faith over the next eight weeks. Begin by writing out a prayer, asking God to grow your faith during this time. Many weeks you'll be encouraged to write your thoughts and/or prayers in your Faith Journal.

Additionally, we encourage you to utilize the Study Guide at the back of this book. Each week includes a commentary, a space for personal Bible study using the H.E.A.R. method, and a devotional. This can add value to both your group discussions and your personal time with God, by providing structure, insight and space to deepen your faith throughout the week.

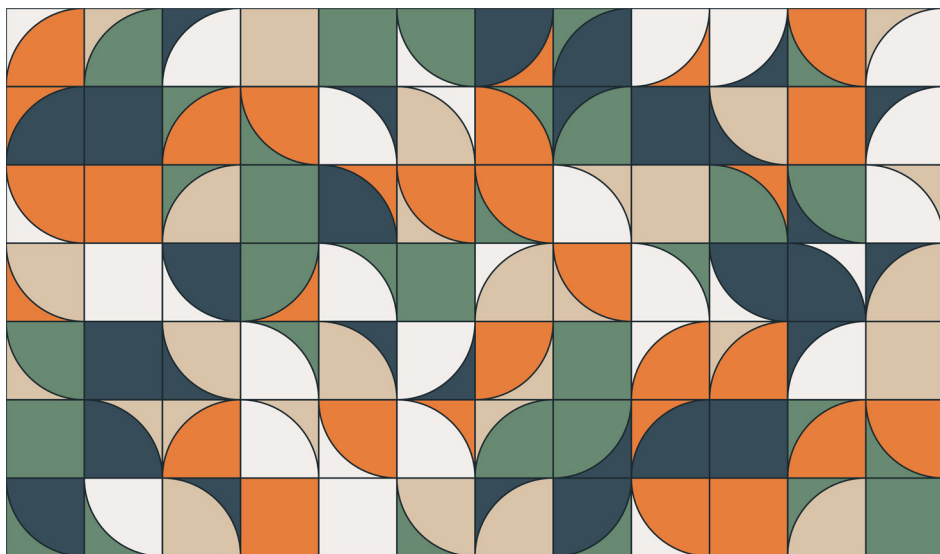


## Week 2 - Faith Relies Upon God's Word

*Hebrews 11:4-7 - By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.*

### Principle

Faith isn't about having all the answers; it's about trusting Christ and stepping out in obedience to His Word, even when the way is unclear, the future seems uncertain, or when life is confusing or hard.





## Gather

1. Have you ever felt God calling you to take a step of faith that seemed illogical or went against “common sense”? What was that experience like for you?
2. What comes to mind when you think of “obedience”?
3. When have you experienced God speaking clearly through His Word?

## Discuss

1. Read Gen. 4:1-11 and Heb. 11:4. What was Abel commended for, and how does his faith still speak today, even after his death?
2. Read Gen. 5:18-24 and Heb. 11:5. What was Enoch commended for, and what does it mean that he “walked with God” (Gen. 5:22-24)?
3. Read Gen. 6:5-6, 11-12. What were the people like in Noah’s day? Now read Gen. 6:8-9. How does God’s view of Noah compare to His view of the rest of humanity at that time?
4. Re-read Heb. 11:6. What three things does the writer of Hebrews say we must do by faith to please God?

## Apply

1. Where are life’s circumstances testing your faith right now? How might you use God’s Word to strengthen it?
2. Like Noah, how are you called to be a witness for Christ to those around you even if they don’t understand or mock your obedience to God’s calling?
3. How are you allowing Scripture to draw you into a closer relationship with God?

## Further

Times of crisis can often test our faith. Think of a person in your life who is facing a crisis. Spend time this week praying for them. Record these prayers in your journal. Check in on them this week.

## Week 3 - Faith Trusts God with Outcomes

*Hebrews 11:8-12 - By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.*

### Principle

When making a decision in faith, we trust God with the results of our decision.

### Gather

1. When facing a big decision, what steps do you take? Who do you seek guidance from, and what resources do you turn to? Share an example from your experience.
2. What do you consider one of your biggest mistakes? Why would you say it was a mistake? What did you learn from it?

### Discuss

1. In Gen. 12:1, God tells Abram, "Go from your country... to the land I will show you." Then, verse 4 begins, "So he went, as the Lord told him." What concerns or fears might have troubled Abram as he prepared to leave?
2. Skim the rest of Gen. 12. How did God strengthen Abram along his journey? What crisis of faith did Abram encounter?

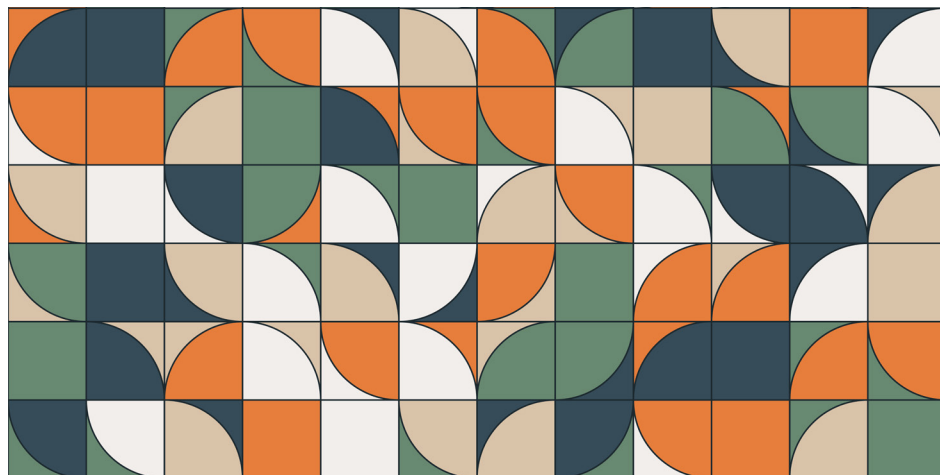
3. How did faith influence Abram's decision to go? How might he have chosen differently if he had relied solely on human reasoning rather than trust in God?
4. Read Gen. 18:9-15. What challenges and encouragements did Sarah face as she placed her faith in God's promise?

## Apply

1. What decision are you facing right now? How might God use doubt to deepen and strengthen your faith and the faith of those watching? How are your desired outcomes influencing the decision?
2. Heb. 11:11 highlights that Sarah "considered Him faithful who had promised." Is it more valuable to place our faith in God rather than in a specific promised outcome? What is the difference between trusting in the promise maker versus the promise itself?

## Further

Uncertainty about the future leads to worry and anxiety. Ps. 37:5 charges us to "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will act." Confess your fear to God and perhaps share with a friend. How do you want God to deepen your faith? Write this as a prayer in your journal.





## Week 4 - Faith Looks Beyond the Here and Now

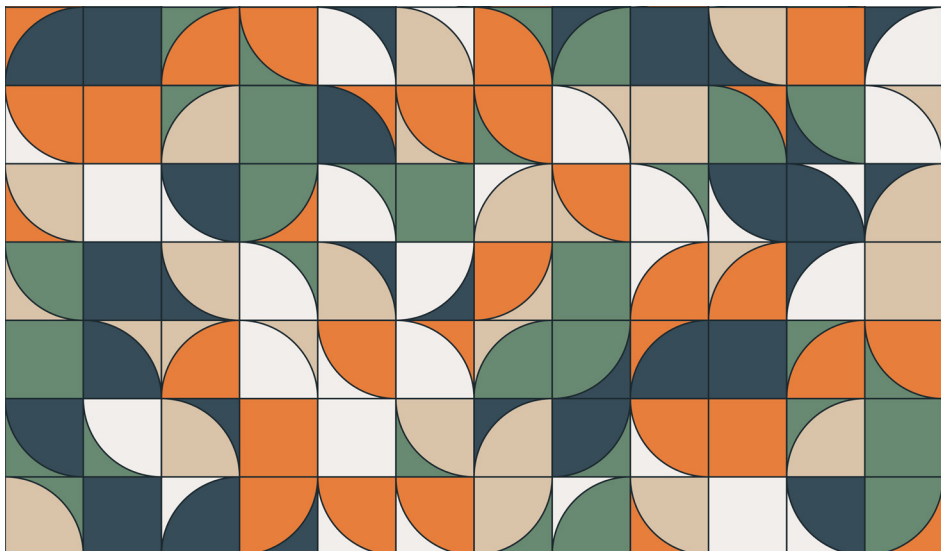
*Hebrews 11:13-16 - These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 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 for them a city.*

### Principle

Living by faith in the here and now can only be done with an eternal perspective.

### Gather

1. Describe a time when you felt like an outsider. What made you feel that way? How did it affect you emotionally, spiritually, or socially?



2. Think of someone who continues to hold onto their faith, even though they haven't yet seen God answer their prayers or fulfill a promise. What's their story (without using names), and how has witnessing their faith impacted you?

## Discuss

1. What does it mean that these people "died in faith" without receiving the promises? How does that challenge or encourage your understanding of faith?
2. Heb. 11:16 speaks of longing for a "better country – a heavenly one." Read Phil. 3:20-21. How does knowing our citizenship is in heaven impact our daily life today?
3. Read Col. 3:1-4. How can we regularly set our minds on things above?
4. This passage states that God is "not ashamed to be called their God." Read James 4:4-8a. What does this reveal about the kind of relationship God desires with those who trust and pursue Him in this way?

## Apply

1. What are you concerned about or disappointed with? How does an eternal mindset ease your anxiety or change your response to it? What decision are you currently facing? How might one of God's promises, when understood in light of eternity, influence that decision?
2. Is there a promise from God that you are still waiting on? How might you allow the waiting process to strengthen your faith?

## Further

Faith in this chapter is portrayed with a long-view perspective—those who believed did not always witness the full realization of God's promises within their lifetime.

Are you being invited to live with a "long-view" faith in any area of your life? Which of God's promises can you focus on as you wait? Write them in your journal. Talk through this with a friend and consider memorizing one of the passages.

## Week 5 - Faith Equals Belief Plus Action

*Hebrews 11:17-22 - By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.*

### Principle

We show our belief in Christ by what we do.

### Gather

1. What comes to mind when you hear the phrase "blind faith"?
2. Is it truly possible to hold a belief but act in a completely different manner? Discuss the relationship between belief and action.

### Discuss

1. Read Heb. 11:17-22. How do the actions described in these verses demonstrate faith? What was the object of their faith?
2. What actions demonstrated Abraham's faith (look for verbs describing what he did)? What statements did Abraham make that expressed his faith, based on the story in Gen. 22?
3. Read Gen. 50:24-25 and then Gen. 15:13-14. How are these two passages related? What specific promise did Joseph believe, and how did his belief lead to a particular action?

4. How do we know when our actions are the result of faithful obedience vs. performance-based striving?

## Apply

1. Abraham and Joseph's beliefs drove their actions. What belief(s) do you have from God's Word that direct(s) your everyday decisions and actions?
2. What do you feel God has been prompting you to do that you've been hesitant to act on? How can this group support you in taking that step?

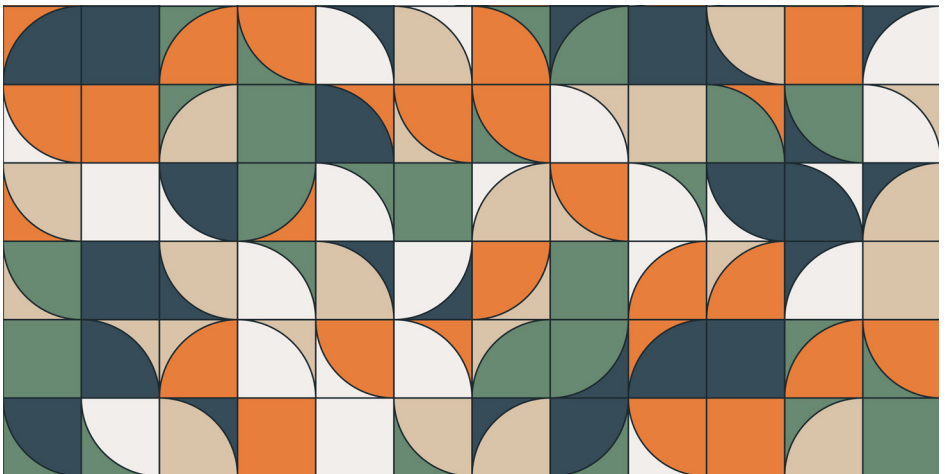
## Further

This week, focus on what God has been prompting you to do. For example, perhaps you feel led to participate in a mission trip, lead a small group, get off social media, give more generously, or share your faith with someone.

What specific belief about God, or from Scripture, encourages you to take this step? What truth empowers you?

Conversely, what belief (or misconception) is holding you back from taking that first step?

Record these thoughts in your journal.

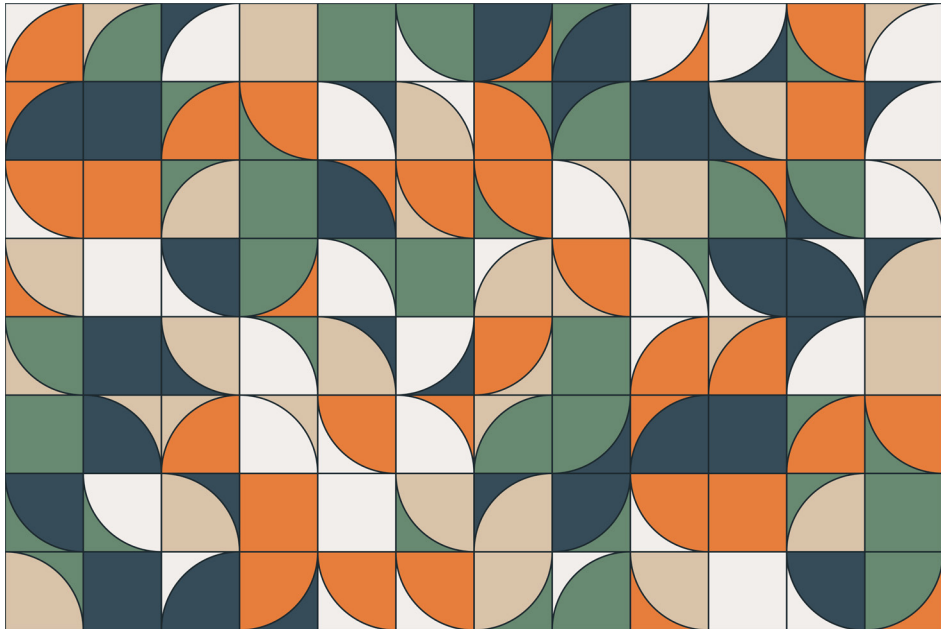


## Week 6 - Faith Involves Denying Ourselves

*Hebrews 11:23-28 - By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.*

### Principle

Faith involves denying ourselves as we follow God.



## Gather

1. Describe a time you faced a difficult decision about whether to follow a rule. What made it a struggle?
2. Who would you consider to be “your people”? With whom do you currently identify and why?

## Discuss

1. Compare Heb. 11:23 and Ex. 1:22-2:2. What were the significant risks Moses’ parents took by hiding him, and what does this tell us about their faith?
2. Read Ex. 2:4-15. How would life as Pharaoh’s grandson differ from that of an Egyptian slave? What did Moses give up as he “looked ahead to his reward” and “saw Him who is invisible?”
3. Read Ex. 3:10-12. How did God ultimately use Moses?
4. How do we discern if what we’re surrendering to is truly God’s will?

## Apply

1. What would be one of the hardest things for you to risk for God? What makes that so challenging?
2. Share something significant you’ve surrendered to God. What was the outcome of that surrender?
3. What are enticing “treasures” in our culture? How has that impacted you or those around you?

## Further

What might God be asking you to surrender today? Security? A habit? A material item? Control? Time? Other?

Write about this in your journal. Take it to the Lord in prayer. Invite a trusted friend to encourage you on this journey.



# Week 7 - Faith Lives in Biblical Community

*Hebrews 11:29-34 - By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies. And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.*

## Principle

Biblical community helps us to live, decide, and act by faith.

## Gather

1. Describe a time a group of people influenced you to do something you wouldn't normally do – good or bad.
2. Who in your life has played a pivotal role in your walk with Jesus? How have they impacted you?

## Discuss

1. Read Ex. 14:1-12. When the Israelites found themselves cornered, what were their thoughts and feelings? Read Ex. 14:13. Who ultimately prevented the Israelites from surrendering and going back to Egypt?
2. Verse 29 says “By faith the people.” What does it take for an entire people to act in faith? What are the pressures working against them?
3. Read Ex. 17:8-13. What do these verses tell us about Joshua?

4. Read Josh. 6:1-7, 15-20. In what ways would this unique approach to capturing Jericho test both Joshua's and the Israelites' faith?

## Apply

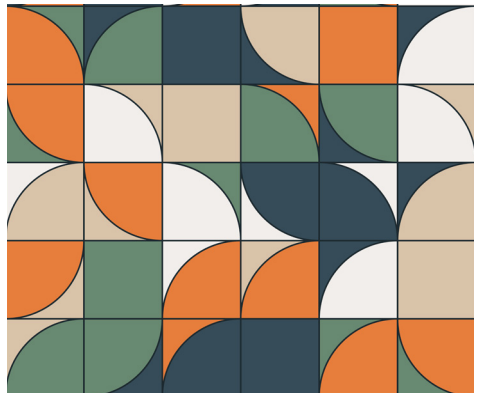
1. Like Moses spoke God's promises to the Israelites, who in your life is helping you grow in your faith? Who can you encourage in their faith journey?
2. Like Joshua, where are you currently outside of your comfort zone? How can others come alongside to offer encouragement and potentially a helpful perspective?
3. Why might God ask his people to do counterintuitive things, like asking a warrior to lead the musicians around Jericho as the way to defeat their enemies?
4. What helps you feel connected in biblical community – and what hinders it?

## Further

Write a note to a person(s) who has influenced your faith walk in a meaningful way.

Set up a time in the next 2-3 weeks to meet with someone you're discipling for Christ. Pray for them – and let them know!

Who do you regularly meet with for the intentional purpose of growing in your walk with Jesus? If you don't have anyone to meet with, scan below to find a Small Group or LifeCommunity.



## Week 8 - Faith Compels Intentionality

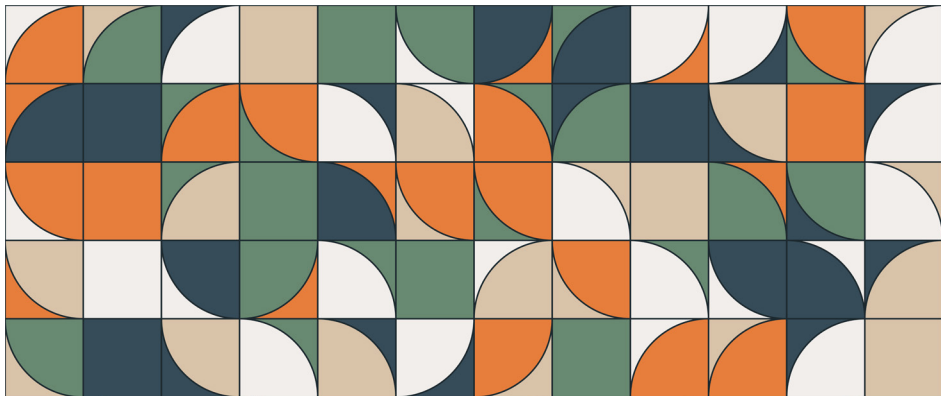
*Hebrews 11:35-40 - Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— of whom the world was not worthy— wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. 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.*

### Principle

When face-to-face with death, intentional faith springs to life.

### Gather

1. Discuss a historical figure (not from the Bible) whom you respect that faced significant hardship or even death for standing up for what they believed was right.
2. Recall a time in your life when you, or someone you know, experienced persecution, mistreatment, or mockery specifically for being a Christian.



## Discuss

1. The author of Hebrews includes these difficult examples of faith, contrasting them with the more positive ones in previous verses (Heb. 11:32-34). Why do you think the author chose to include these accounts of suffering and hardship?
2. The author references a story from 1 Kings 17:17-24. In this account, how did the widow of Zarephath demonstrate intentional faith? How might this story have unfolded if the widow had no faith at all?
3. Read 2 Sam. 16:5-14. Discuss how David responded in the face of mockery and unjust treatment. Where was his focus? In a world that often avoids discomfort at all cost, how does our faith shape the way we respond to suffering – our own, or that of others?
4. Phil. 1:21 says, “to live is Christ, to die is gain.” How does faith help us form our perspective on this life and the next?

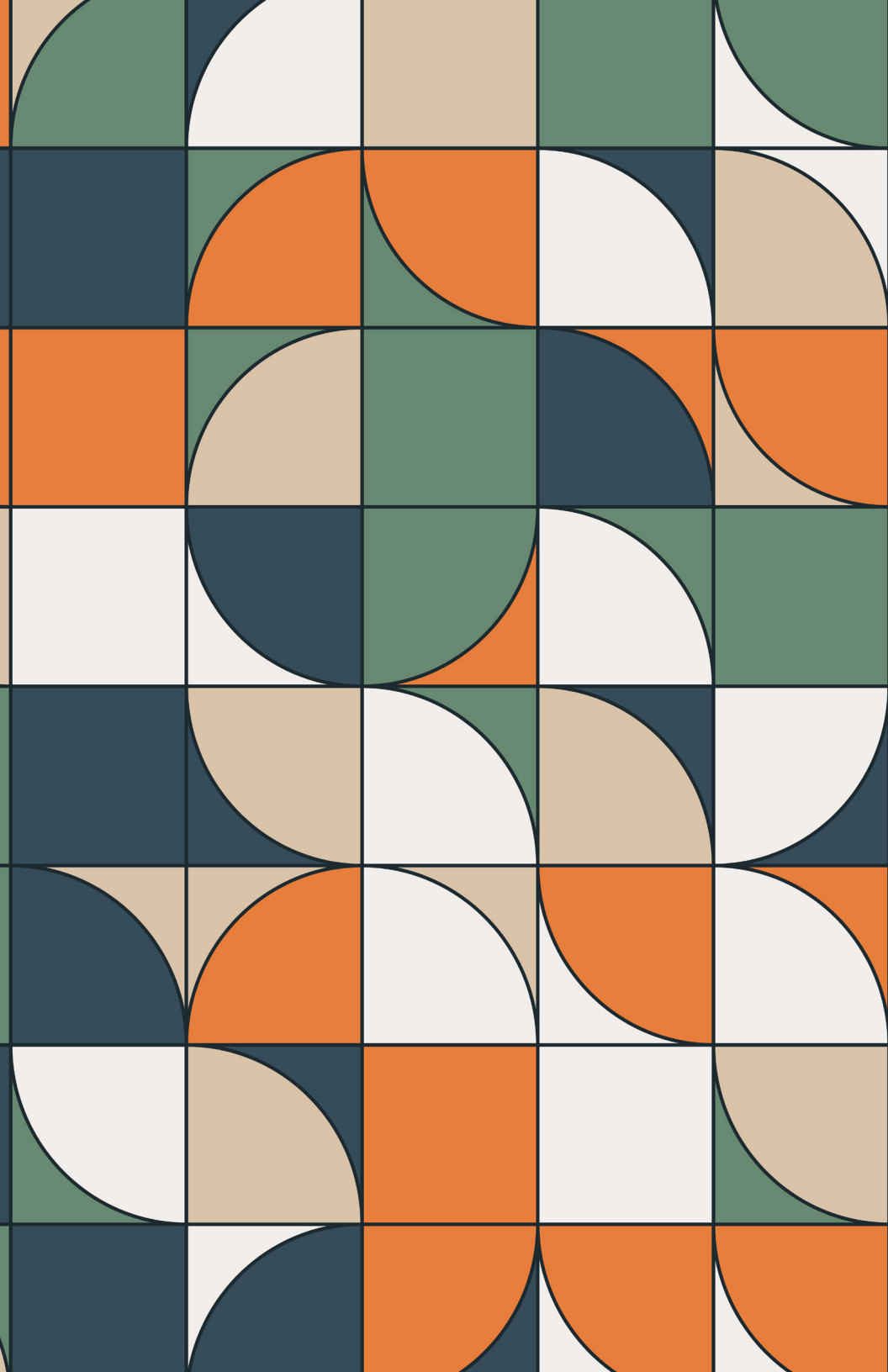
## Apply

1. If something catastrophic were to happen in your life, how do you imagine it would impact your faith in Christ? How do you think such circumstances impact how God sees you?
2. What role does planning have in living a faith-filled life, even when all our plans are dashed?
3. On Week 1, you were asked to rate your faith on a scale of 1-10. If you were to rate yourself now, what changes have taken place, and why?

## Further

Hebrews 11 is often called the “Hall of Faith,” highlighting people whose trust in God shaped history. Heb. 12:1 reminds us that their lives serve as a testimony to help us stay focused on Jesus. If you were to create your own “Hall of Faith” of people you know who have inspired your faith, who would you include?

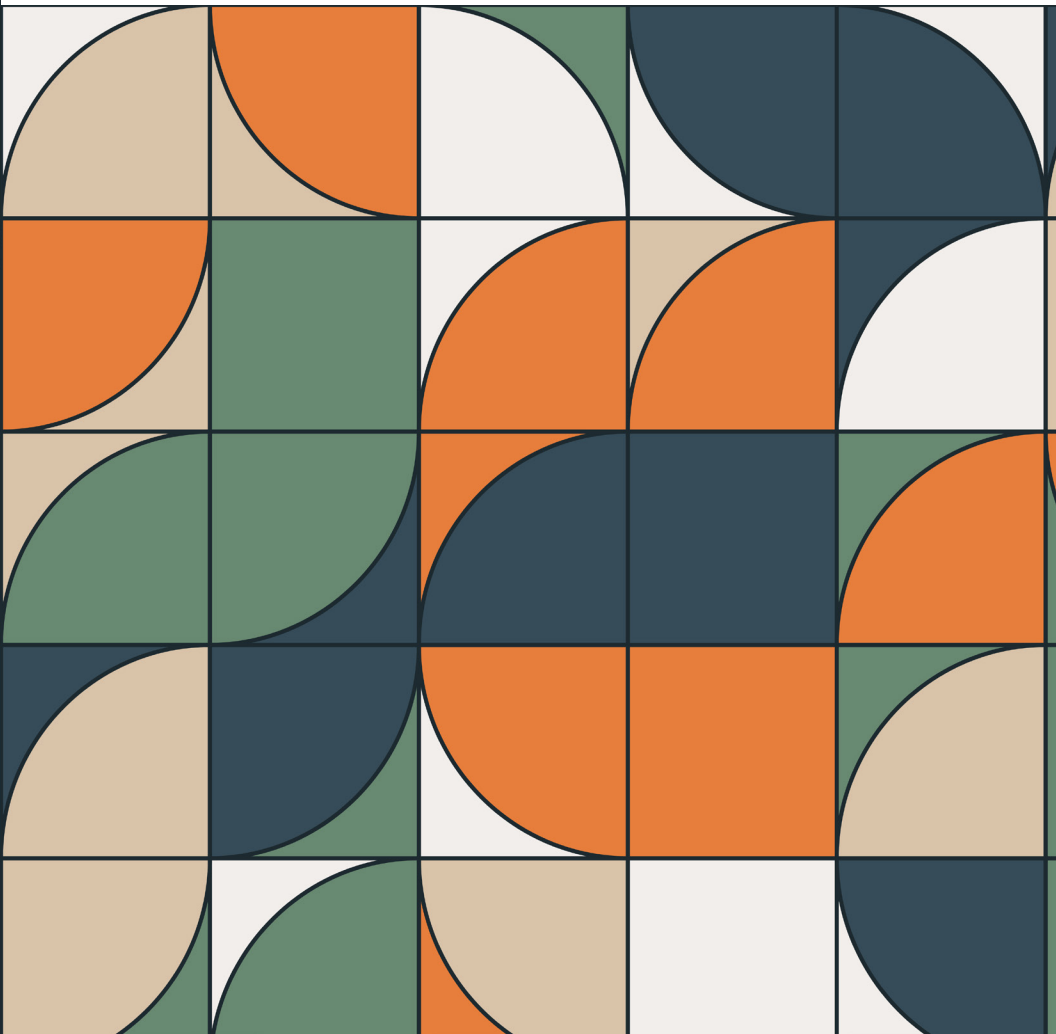
Consider writing their stories down to encourage both you and those you care about. Let those included know they are in your personal Hall of Faith!





# study guide

*commentary | H.E.A.R. | devotional*





# Week 1 - Commentary

Let's begin this week's commentary on Hebrews 11:1-3 by providing some definitions to key words:

**Faith** (Greek *pistis* - πίστις) - an assurance or firm conviction that leads to action based on the character and nature of God and the person's relationship to God.

**Assurance** (Greek *hypostasis* - ὑπόστασις) - support or substantive fact. This is a scientific term indicating a fact that is verifiable, unlike a theory or hypothesis that has yet to be proven.

**Conviction** (Greek *elegchos* - ἔλεγχος) - proof, evidence, or verifiable fact. This is a legal term for evidence that will hold up in a court of law and can be used for a conviction.

Faith in verse 1 is not a "cross your fingers and hope everything works out" blind leap of faith, but rather, an assurance that what God has said in His Word is true, and we can take it as fact and live out our lives in Christ accordingly.

Faith has to have an object (a person, place, or thing) to be anchored to. As followers of Christ, our faith is in a person, not just any person, but the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who lived a perfect life, died for our sins, and rose again on the third day to live forevermore.

When we compare other objects that we might place our faith in or on, we quickly see that those persons, places, or things pale in comparison to Jesus. They are not eternal, they are flawed, they are not reliable when we need them the most.

To be sure, we do put some level of faith in people, places, and things every day. We sit down on a chair in faith, believing that the chair will hold us up. We get in our car and believe that it will start (and stop when we need it to!) and get us to our destination. We have faith in our postal service to deliver a birthday card we send to a friend or family member. When it gets delivered is another matter!

Verse 2 reminds us that faith was not something invented in the New Testament; in fact, the people of old (from ancient times in the Old Testament) were called to live by faith as well. When these saints of old lived by faith, the author of Hebrews said that God was pleased with them and commended them for their faith.

Verse 3 reminds us that we take the Creation account in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 by faith. No one except the Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) were around when the universe and everything in it was formed. This included Adam and Eve before they sinned in Genesis chapter 3. Adam and Eve were God's crowning glory in His creation; everything else in creation was complete before they were created. By faith, they believed that God created the universe in all its beauty and glory and plopped them down in the middle of it all.

Verse 3 also reminds us that the universe was created by the word of God - God spoke the universe into being. This reminds us that God is infinite (and conversely, we are not). Verse 3 also tells us that what God made (and what we see) was not made out of things that are visible. What did God start with to create the universe? By faith, we believe that He simply spoke it into existence out of nothing.

While it might be fun to imagine that we could walk into our kitchen and speak our dinner and dessert into existence, God does not give us that power or authority. Instead, He gives us delicious ingredients that we can then combine into tasty dishes to feed ourselves and our families. If we want to make a chocolate cake, we have to begin with ingredients that we can see, touch, and smell - tangible elements like flour, salt, eggs, butter, and cocoa powder in the right proportions. After all that, we must then apply heat and time to bake the cake and arrive at the desired end product.

So what is our response to Hebrews 11:1-3? First, to believe in faith that God is who He says He is, and second, to worship Him for what He has done, what He is doing, and what He promises to do in the future.

# Week 1 - H.E.A.R. Method

*Hebrews 11:1-3*

## Highlight

Read with purpose, noting any verse that stands out. Write out the following: book name, scripture passage, a title summarizing the passage.

## Explain

Explain the passage's meaning by asking: Why was it written? To whom was it addressed? How does it fit within the context? What is the Holy Spirit communicating?



## Apply

Write how the passage applies to you with questions like: How does this help me? What does this mean today? Write 2 to 5 sentences on its relevance to your life.

## Respond

Write your response - this could be a commitment, an action plan, or a prayer based on what you've learned.

# Week 1 - Devotional

*Rachel Creaturo*

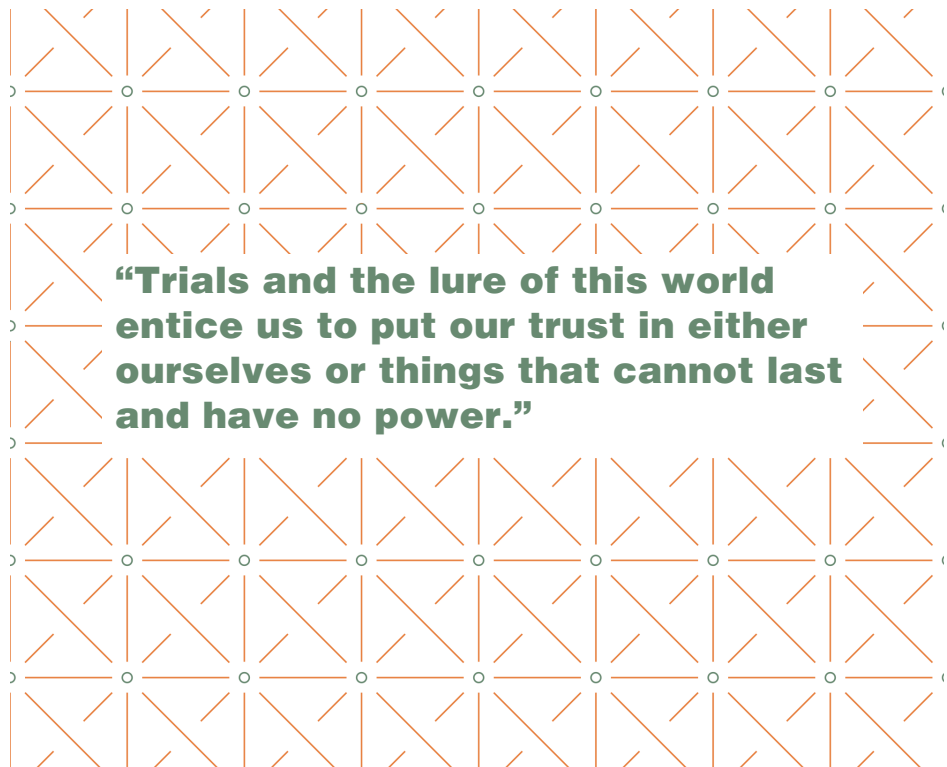
Hebrews 11 is one of the most celebrated chapters in all of Scripture. Many of you can name some of those included in it off the top of your head! Yet, before the first Old Testament saint is mentioned, the author determines to make sure all of Christ's followers are on the same page regarding faith. Why is this necessary? The reason draws from what was just said in 10:35-36, "...do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance..." To encourage believers that the Gospel is indeed worth it, the writer explains faith by its definition, outcome, and foundation in the first three verses of chapter eleven.

Effective definitions say the most with the least number of words. They provide clear direction while allowing room for examples and questions to flow through the reader's mind. This definition of faith in verse one does just that! I am captured and emboldened by the strength of the words assurance and conviction. They challenge me to examine my faith. Am I yearning for things hoped for and not seen that have been promised to believers: completed glory and a share in the perfect promised dwelling? I confess that my sight has often been set on much lower things.

The outcome of faith in Christ is woven throughout all three verses. Faith sustains and encourages us to press on for our future hope (v.1). Through faith, we receive acceptance and reward (v.2). And faith produces an understanding that is beyond what man can comprehend (V.3). These three things—sustainment, reward, and understanding—would be vital in the lives of the early church as they faced temptation to give up amid persecution. And they are essential to you and me today. Trials and the lure of this world entice us to put our trust in either ourselves or things that cannot last and have no power. We are called to put our faith in the One who is eternal and holds all things together.

Undergirding that faith is the acknowledgment that God is our Creator. The Old Testament saints were able to step out in faith because this was their foundation. They followed in obedience because they recognized that they belonged to the God who made them. The writer of Hebrews affirms this for the church, of which you and I are a part. In fact, this foundation was expounded upon by the Apostle John, who revealed that it was through Jesus that all things were made and that nothing was made without Him (John 1:1-4). The One who created us is the very One who saved us!

Hard circumstances dare to poke holes in our faith, aiming to cause leaks that question what God is doing. My faith has been tested by miscarriage and the mental health struggles of a loved one. My faith has been tested by disappointment in others' behaviors, as well as my own. I rejoice knowing that these things are not the end of my story. And your struggles are not the end of your story. Our faith will be rewarded by enjoying the presence of the Savior in glory forever. For this, church, we press on!



**“Trials and the lure of this world  
entice us to put our trust in either  
ourselves or things that cannot last  
and have no power.”**



## Week 2 - Commentary

As we look at Hebrews 11:4-7 this week, we see three main characters commended for their faith: Abel, Enoch, and Noah.

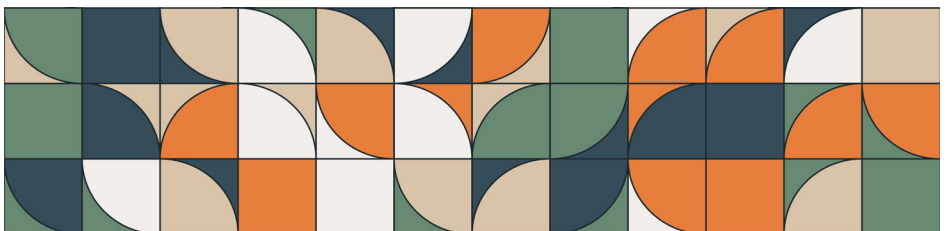
Abel was the son of Adam and Eve, the first family. Cain was the oldest child of Adam and Eve; Abel was his younger brother.

In the Genesis 4 account of this first family, there is no record of what God asked them to present as a sacrifice to Himself. All we know is that Cain's offering of the fruit of the ground was not acceptable before God, but Abel's sacrifice of animals from his flock was acceptable. Cain was angry and ended up killing his brother Abel (most likely out of jealousy).

Can you imagine how awful that first murder scene must have been, even for Cain? We have become desensitized to these images, seeing pictures of war, of violence in our cities, in movies and in video games.

While Abel's obedience and faith was pleasing to God, it ended up costing Abel his life at the hand of his brother. Abel's righteousness and obedience in faith carried on, even when his life ended. Verse 4 sums up Abel's faith this way: "And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks."

Enoch is the next person mentioned in this week's passage. Genesis chapter 5 tells us that Enoch walked with God after he became the father of Methuselah (Genesis 5:21-22). The Bible does not say what Enoch was like before he became a father, only what his life was like after. If you have had a baby join your family, it changes everything, including your priorities, your schedule, and your relationship with God!



So what does it mean that Enoch “walked with God”? Jesus described this close relationship between God and people in John chapter 15, where He paints the picture of a vine and its branches being connected all the time. The branches receive their life from the vine, and the ability to do what they were intended to do - bear fruit.

Noah is the third person mentioned in this section, applauded for his faith in following God’s command to build an ark to save his family. The world was really awful in Noah’s day. Genesis 6:5 states, “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

Using our biblically-informed imagination, think about the conversations the people in the area must have had with Noah... Noah and his sons worked 75 years to build a boat to withstand something catastrophic like a flood. The people of that day had likely never seen rain, much less a flood. His family was likely a laughingstock for the entire community! But Noah trusted the Lord, and in faith, continued to invest in the work the Lord had given him, and encouraged his family to walk in faith as well. Verse 6, in the middle of this week’s section, is the central thought: “And without faith, it is impossible to please Him [God]...” What does the author say we need to do?

1. Draw near to God
2. Believe that God exists
3. Believe that God rewards those who seek Him

“In our modern world that is dependent on the senses, dominated by the sensual, and dissected by the sciences, a Christian life of faith is an enigma... The more skeptical and materialistic our world becomes, the more outlandish the person of faith will appear” (Chuck Swindoll, *Living Insights Commentary on Hebrews*, p. 167).

# Week 2 - H.E.A.R. Method

*Hebrews 11:4-7*

## Highlight

Read with purpose, noting any verse that stands out. Write out the following: book name, scripture passage, a title summarizing the passage.

## Explain

Explain the passage's meaning by asking: Why was it written? To whom was it addressed? How does it fit within the context? What is the Holy Spirit communicating?



## Apply

Write how the passage applies to you with questions like: How does this help me? What does this mean today? Write 2 to 5 sentences on its relevance to your life.

## Respond

Write your response - this could be a commitment, an action plan, or a prayer based on what you've learned.

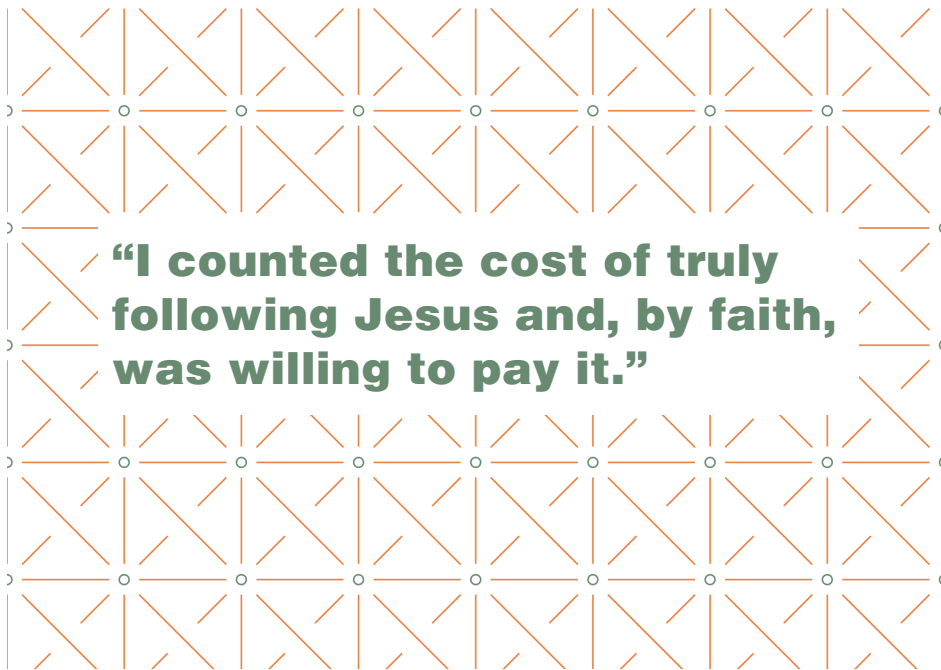
# Week 2 - Devotional

*Jeffrey Irons*

It was October of 1994. I was forty-one years old; an unbeliever knowing nothing about God, the Bible, or the church. To me, Christianity was just another religion. Void of any knowledge of God, except that creation screams, “He exists!”, all I knew and could relate to was the world.

The world promised me happiness if only I became highly educated, successful, and rich. I accomplished what the world prescribed (except rich) - MBA, corporate executive, six-figure income, custom-built lake-home, and a lovely wife. I, painfully, came to realize that the world’s prescription for happiness was a deceitful lie.

One Sunday afternoon, as I surfed the T.V. channels for NFL football games to watch, I stumbled upon a man who was obviously a preacher. I was compelled to listen to him speak as he shared what I would soon learn was the gospel of Jesus Christ. By God-given faith, I believed the good news and received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of my life.



**“I counted the cost of truly following Jesus and, by faith, was willing to pay it.”**

During the next five years I listened to, read, and studied God's Word. I learned that "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Matt.13:44). By faith, I believed I was that man, because that verse exactly described my response to the gospel.

Then I learned and understood Jesus' words when He said, "If anyone would come after Me let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). I counted the cost of truly following Jesus and, by faith, was willing to pay it.

In 1998, at forty-five years old, I desired nothing more than to know God more deeply through His Word. I sensed an irresistible drawing to attend seminary. As I prayed and considered such a radical change in the new trajectory of my life, I was assured, from God's Word, that I was to trust in the Lord with all my heart, and to not lean on my own understanding. In all my ways I was to acknowledge Him, and He would make straight my paths (Prov. 3:5-6). By faith, I stopped directing my own life and submitted to God's direction instead.

God, therefore, built my faith in Him through His word sufficiently to trust Him. I walked away from my career and twenty-three years' of accumulated "things" and attended seminary without knowing the details of how my life would turn out.

For the past thirty-one years, my life has been an unbelievable adventure walking with God through Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit. I love God who loved me first and gave Himself for me. The least I can do is to present myself as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to Him, which is my reasonable act of worship. By faith, therefore, I continue worshiping Him with my life.



## Week 3 - Commentary

In Hebrews 11:8-12, the author jumps ahead to Genesis chapters 12 through 21 and summarizes the faith journey of Abraham and Sarah.

We know from the Genesis account that Abraham and Sarah were hand-picked to be the father and mother of God's chosen people, the nation of Israel. As great as that sounds, the Bible tells us that it was not all roses and happy times for this first family.

In Abraham and Sarah's day, they lived in a close-knit tribal culture. To leave the tribe was a rejection of the family and the tribe. Imagine Abraham telling his family that God had called him to a new place that He (God) would show him. No forwarding address, no known destination, no idea how long it would take to get there. But Abraham got up, and in faith, took his family and possessions and followed God's leading to a place he had never been to or seen.

Also, God told Abraham that this land would be the place where his ancestors would live and occupy the land. Abraham eventually stood in his future homeland, but as a visitor and alien, not as an owner.

What was Abraham's response when God promised to make his descendants as numerous as the sand on the seashore through Sarah, his wife? He laughed (Genesis 17:15-17)!

Sometime after this encounter, three visitors came to Abraham and Sarah's tent and shared the same promise. This time, Sarah heard the promise... and she laughed as well (Genesis 18:9-15)!

Even in their old age, past their childbearing years, Abraham and Sarah chose to overcome doubt and step out in faith to trust God's promise to them. And just as God promised, Abraham and Sarah brought Isaac into the world. And what did Isaac's name mean? "He laughs"!

Abraham and Sarah's growing faith over time is a good reminder of Jesus' words in Luke 17:6: "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."

God takes the smallest amount of faith in Him and multiplies it into something bigger, as only He can do. Doubts may surround us, but when we take a step of faith and obedience to what God is calling us to be and to do, He rejoices!

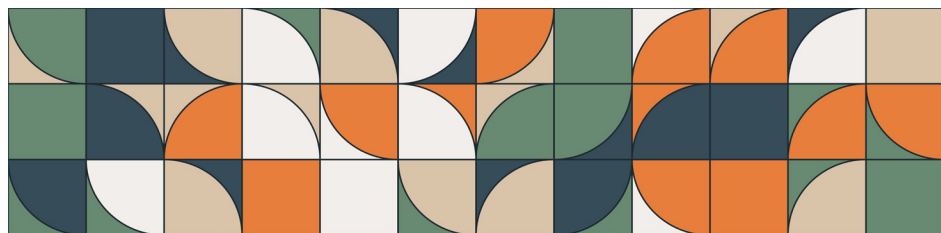
So what do we do when we are discouraged and doubting? We can pray the prayer of the man with the demon-possessed son in Mark 9:17-27 - "I believe; help me in my unbelief!"

Abraham and Sarah both died without seeing God's ultimate fulfillment of His promise to them... having descendants as numerous as the sand on the seashore, and possessing the Promised Land. Like Abraham and Sarah, we can place our faith in Christ, even when we don't see the end result.

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, speaks of Abraham's and Sarah's growing faith in God's Word and promises:

*"He [Abraham] did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness" (Romans 4:19-22 ESV, bracketed text added).*

May our faith in Christ grow as Abraham and Sarah's did.



# Week 3 - H.E.A.R. Method

*Hebrews 11:8-12*

## Highlight

Read with purpose, noting any verse that stands out. Write out the following: book name, scripture passage, a title summarizing the passage.

## Explain

Explain the passage's meaning by asking: Why was it written? To whom was it addressed? How does it fit within the context? What is the Holy Spirit communicating?



## Apply

Write how the passage applies to you with questions like: How does this help me? What does this mean today? Write 2 to 5 sentences on its relevance to your life.

## Respond

Write your response - this could be a commitment, an action plan, or a prayer based on what you've learned.

## Week 3 - Devotional

*John & Bev Swem*

We moved to an underdeveloped foreign country to serve as missionaries in 1986. We had four children ranging in age from 13 down to 18 months and went from living in a comfortable house of 2000 square feet to an apartment half that size with one bathroom. There were about 200 foreigners living in a city of several million.

Life was full of challenges. Bicycles and buses were the main forms of transportation. The country had experienced government-caused food shortages and basic items like eggs and sugar were still being rationed. There was also a spiritual famine with only a couple church buildings open and severe restrictions on when Christians could gather for worship.

For a few years we continued to use the same type of birth control that we had been using in Greensboro. The Lord spoke to us about trusting Him for the number of children we had so we stopped using birth control. After a time Beverly, then 43, conceived again when our youngest was 6. Local women were only allowed to have one child and were subject to forced abortions if they conceived again. While that law was not applied to foreigners, initially we were not certain that we would be allowed to stay in the country.

Beverly had an exam at a local hospital. The doctor was friendly but counseled against continuing the pregnancy given potential complications due to her age. We told her that was not something we would even consider, so she marked Beverly's file "geriatric pregnancy" and scheduled her next appointment.

We saw God supply in so many ways over the next few months. We counted it a blessing that there was an American doctor in town and that the hospital agreed that he could do the delivery. None of us then realized that meant that once we got in the delivery room there would be no assistance from hospital staff.

There was a moment of panic after birth when the aspirator would not work and no one would help our doctor, but that was just one more way for God to show that he had this all in hand.

Our delivery went so well that the next year two other moms on our team decided to deliver their babies at the same hospital with the same doctor, and all went well. When a third mom did likewise, there was a complication more severe than a malfunctioning aspirator and the baby died. The doctor refused to do any more deliveries there.

Trusting God does not always mean we get our way. Our western culture does all it can so that we “have it our way”. We cherish comfort and personal peace. May we not forget that God is all-powerful and all good all of the time. There are seasons to laugh and seasons to weep. Praise His name forever.



**“...but that was just one more way for God to show that he had this all in hand.”**

## Week 4 - Commentary

In Hebrews 11:13-16, the author of Hebrews pauses for a moment and looks back on the people mentioned so far - Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, reminding the readers (and us!) that these people not only lived in faith, but also died in faith as well, not having received what was promised to them.

All these people, the author of Hebrews says, saw God's promises "from afar", and "acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13).

So what in the world does this mean? The author answers this question in verse 14: "For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland."

So were these saints of old looking forward to a new homeland, or looking backward to their former homeland? Verse 15 makes it clear that these saints had the opportunity to return to their former homeland, but chose to press forward to a new homeland that God had promised.

Even though Abraham was standing in the Promised Land, he identified himself as "a sojourner and foreigner among you..." to the people of Canaan.

Even when Sarah died, Abraham did not go back to their homeland to bury her - he negotiated to buy a burial plot in the Promised Land, even though neither he nor his descendants possessed the land yet.

And where were Abraham and the others focused as their homeland? Nothing short of heaven itself, to be present with God. Verse 16 tells us "they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one." Verse 16 goes on to tell us that God honored their faith: "Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city."

These saints of old exemplified and lived out the definition of faith that the author of Hebrews gave us: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1 ESV).

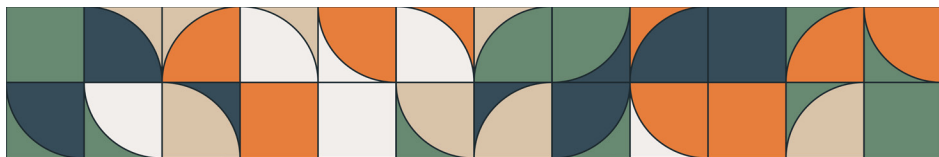
The writer of Hebrews uses this example of the saints of old renouncing their old land and old ways as encouragement to the Jewish Christians to renounce their old dependence on the Law and look forward to a better country, a heavenly one, where Christ is and where He has prepared a place for them.

We see the saints of old and their forward look toward Messiah and ultimately eternity with God in heaven. Between their day and ours, Jesus has come, lived, died, risen again, and is now seated with the Father in heaven. Should we see ourselves as having “arrived”? Or do we share a common status with the saints of old as “sojourners and foreigners” in our world?

Peter, in his first letter, reminds his readers (and us!) to see ourselves in the view of a world to come: “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul” (1 Peter 2:11 ESV). Sojourners and exiles... sounds like we need to be looking forward as well, doesn't it?

Paul reminds us to keep this heaven-focused perspective in the here-and-now world we live in: “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14 ESV).

This does not relieve us of what God has called us to be and to do this side of eternity; Paul simply reminds us that our focus is on Christ and eternity while we labor faithfully here on earth until He calls us home.





# Week 4 - H.E.A.R. Method

*Hebrews 11:13-16*

## Highlight

Read with purpose, noting any verse that stands out. Write out the following: book name, scripture passage, a title summarizing the passage.

## Explain

Explain the passage's meaning by asking: Why was it written? To whom was it addressed? How does it fit within the context? What is the Holy Spirit communicating?



## Apply

Write how the passage applies to you with questions like: How does this help me? What does this mean today? Write 2 to 5 sentences on its relevance to your life.

## Respond

Write your response - this could be a commitment, an action plan, or a prayer based on what you've learned.

# Week 4 - Devotional

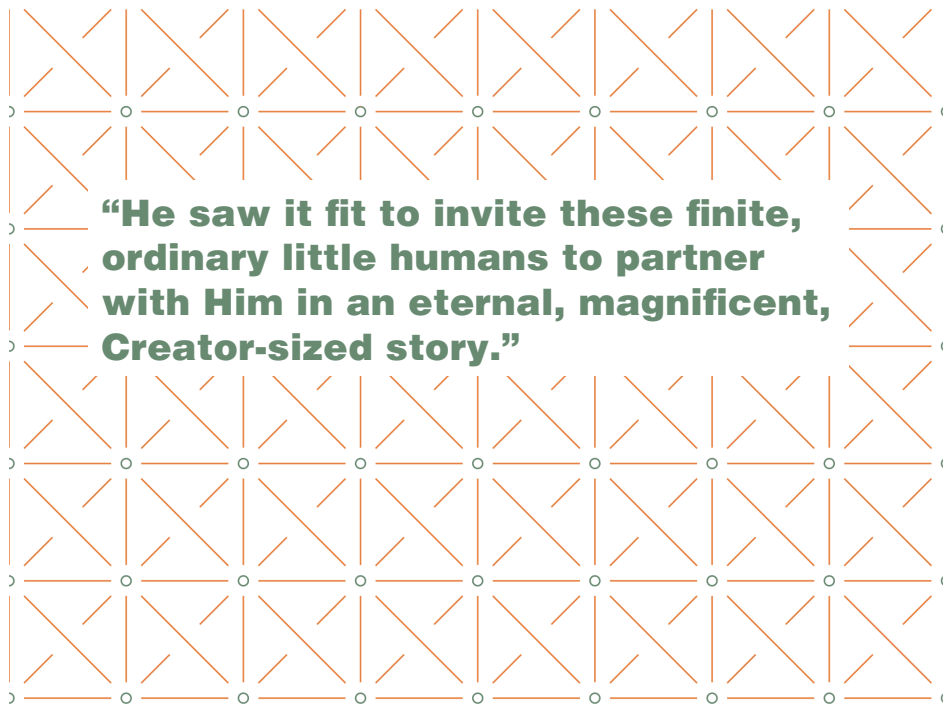
Kate Reece

*“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.”*

– Heb. 11:13

Sometimes when I read Heb. 11:13a, a little voice in the back of mind says, “B-b-b-but what about now, God?” Not receiving the things promised until heaven is a tough pill for me to swallow - it can make the present look pretty bleak. Bleak enough that I dragged my feet for two weeks before I completed this devotional.

Yet, the Lord hears our cries and does not dismiss them. And in His way (having me wrestle with Scripture for days) and in His time (a few hours before the deadline), He responded.



**“He saw it fit to invite these finite, ordinary little humans to partner with Him in an eternal, magnificent, Creator-sized story.”**

He tenderly reminded me that, yes, His Truly Good Plan is more vast and complex than I can fathom, but that doesn't mean that my earthly life and current welfare aren't also at the top of His mind. All times and places are important to God - not just the future and heaven. He's not squirreling all my blessings away for the afterlife, just to leave me cursed here on earth. The Lord cares deeply about right now, about my tiny little lifespan. In *Waking the Dead*, John Eldridge puts it this way:

*"Jesus doesn't locate his offer to us only in some distant future after we've slogged our way through our days here on earth. He talks about a life that's available to us in this age. [...] When we hear the words eternal life, most of us tend to interpret that as "a life that waits for us in eternity." But eternal means "unending", not later. [...] The offer is life and that life starts now."*

Look at Abraham and Sarah. Yes, God's promises to them were not completely fulfilled in their lifetime, but they received an abundant unfolding of those promises here on earth. Research their very imperfect lives - they tasted and saw the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living time after time after time. And Heb. 11:13a says that all of their experiences of God's protection, provision, redemption, and miracles were considered just greeting the promises from afar!

And God didn't stop there. He saw it fit to invite these finite, ordinary little humans to partner with Him in an eternal, magnificent, Creator-sized story. His promises to Abraham and Sarah were so preposterously grand and beautiful that they needed millenia to fully bloom.

So, no, I won't receive the fullness of all God's promises to me in this life. But maybe that is because His promises are so vast, not because the present is devoid of their fulfillment. He still gladly grants me the privilege of seeing seeds of promise break through the ground and trains me to tend to their tiny shoots and buds. I might not get to see their flowering stems stretch to their full height in this lifetime, but they are still beautiful, here and now.

## Week 5 - Commentary

In Hebrews 11:17-22, the author of Hebrews picks up the previous narrative from Hebrews 11:12 and continues on with the faith example of Abraham, then expands to the faith examples of Abraham's family lineage: Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. If you're following along in Genesis, this covers from Genesis chapter 22 through the end of the book of Genesis (Chapter 50).

The author of Hebrews moves from a happy note about the long-awaited birth of Isaac ("he laughs") in Hebrews 11:8-12 to 17-18, where God tested Abraham's faith by asking him to sacrifice Isaac, the promised son and heir of the promise of the nation of Israel.

Genesis 22:1-2 states: "After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.'"

Notice that Abraham's faith is not demonstrated in his hearing God's command, but in his resultant action in Genesis 22:3: "So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him."

Abraham obeyed immediately! There was no questioning of God's extreme command, no request for clarification or how this might work out, no reminding God of His promise of a great nation through Isaac, just obedience and faith in the God who had brought them Isaac and promised his lineage in the nation of Israel.

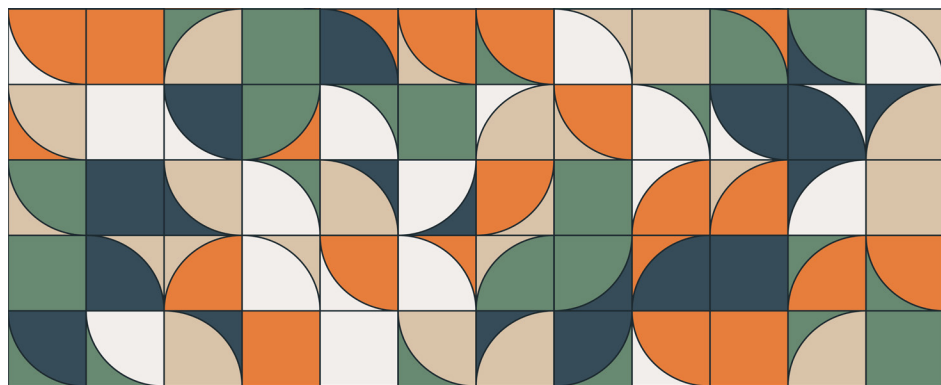
We also see the faith of Abraham when he tells his servant to wait while he and Isaac go to make the sacrifice: "Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you' (Genesis 22:5 ESV).

The NIV translation captures the nuance of Abraham's faith: "He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you" (Genesis 22:5 NIV, underlines added for emphasis). Abraham did not say "we will worship and I will come back to you." He used "we" for both the trip out and the trip back, implying that God would either protect or restore the life of Isaac, Abraham's promised son and only heir to Israel.

The text in Hebrews 11:20-21 shows the faith of Isaac and Jacob to carry forth the blessing of Abraham, believing that God would fulfill His promise to make them a great nation one day. Even Joseph believed that God would restore His people to the Promised Land one day. Joseph's faith was strong - even though he was about to die, and the Jewish people would not go back to the Promised Land in his lifetime, he believed that God would keep His covenant with His people one day. So Joseph made them promise to take his bones back from Egypt (where he was going to be buried) to God's Promised Land, Israel (Genesis 50:25).

And about 400 years later, Joseph's faith was rewarded - the Israelites remembered their promise to Joseph and carried his bones back to Israel to be buried among his people. Read the stories for yourself in Exodus 13:19 and Joshua 24:32.

May we be found faithful, exhibiting our beliefs through our actions.



# Week 5 - H.E.A.R. Method

*Hebrews 11:17-22*

## Highlight

Read with purpose, noting any verse that stands out. Write out the following: book name, scripture passage, a title summarizing the passage.

## Explain

Explain the passage's meaning by asking: Why was it written? To whom was it addressed? How does it fit within the context? What is the Holy Spirit communicating?



## Apply

Write how the passage applies to you with questions like: How does this help me? What does this mean today? Write 2 to 5 sentences on its relevance to your life.

## Respond

Write your response - this could be a commitment, an action plan, or a prayer based on what you've learned.



# Week 5 - Devotional

*Carl & Linda Bass*

Linda and I began attending Westover in January 1979. Honestly, we went for the children's program. Linda and I had been married seven years, had one son, and Linda was six months pregnant with our second child. We were just trying to be good parents. But God had something much bigger in mind.

We quickly became engaged in Sunday School and small groups. Linda joined a young moms' Bible study, and I joined a men's group. Though we had trusted Christ years earlier (ten for me, sixteen for Linda), this was the first time we encountered Biblical teaching that felt practical and directly relevant to daily life.

We each brought personal baggage into our marriage. Linda grew up with alcoholic parents, which left her with trust and security issues. I was raised in a performance-driven environment and carried a heavy load of pride and self-reliance.

During that first year and a half, I studied Genesis and was struck by Abraham's faith—how he left everything behind without knowing where he was going—and by Sarah's willingness to follow him! Abraham faced many tests, and he didn't pass them all, but God remained faithful. That truth stuck with me.

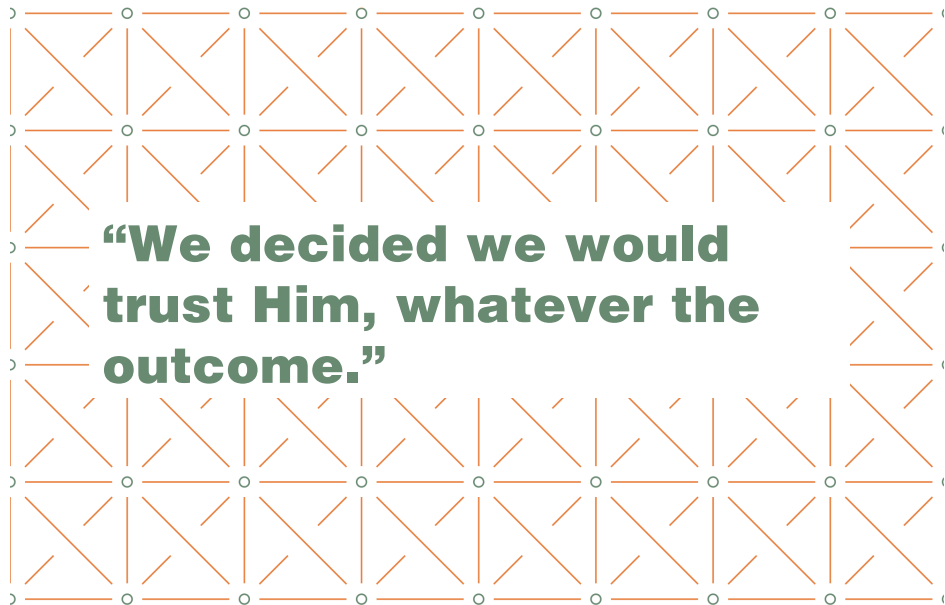
In April 1980, we hit a breaking point. Our family was on the edge—we just couldn't keep living the way we were. I was a workaholic, disconnected from my wife and kids. Linda was tired from parenting by herself. God led both of us, through different paths, to the same conclusion: we needed to start over, this time building on Biblical principles.

This decision required humility and faith. We had to admit we'd been chasing the wrong things. We felt we were being led to sell our home and cars. Mortgage rates were around 12%, and the housing market was frozen. It looked impossible. But the day we listed our house, a buyer made a full-price, all-cash offer. The only catch: they wanted to close in two weeks. We panicked—me, because we were now a family of four with nowhere to live; Linda, because it felt like we might never own a home again.

By faith, we sold our home, trusting God to provide. We believed God is the owner, and He is in control. We decided we would trust Him, whatever the outcome. That step of obedience marked the beginning of a new chapter. God proved Himself faithful during that season and used that time to prepare us for future trials—some we've already faced, and some we're still navigating today. Now, after 54 years of marriage, we are so thankful God walked us through this difficult part of our journey.

Two truths we learned:

- Faith makes things possible, but it doesn't make them easy.
- We've learned to choose to trust God, even when we have no idea what He's doing.



**“We decided we would  
trust Him, whatever the  
outcome.”**

## Week 6 - Commentary

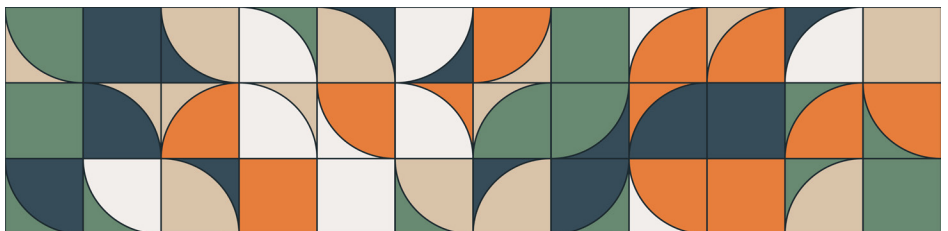
In Hebrews 11:23-28, the author of Hebrews shifts the spotlight of faith from Abraham and the patriarchs to Moses and the timeframe of Moses and the Law.

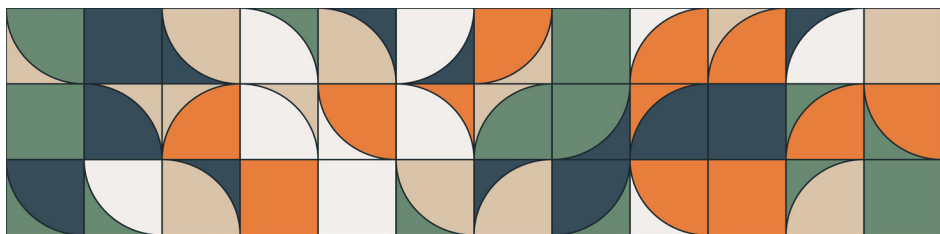
The author actually starts with Moses' parents, Amram and Jochabed hiding their son in direct defiance of the Egyptian order to kill all Israelite boys when they were born (Exodus 2:1-10). They loved their son, and went to great lengths to preserve his life until he was too big to hide any longer. They then hid Moses in the weeds near where Pharaoh's daughter took her baths.

God honored the faith of Moses' parents, and Pharaoh's daughter had compassion on Moses and adopted him as her son. Pharaoh's daughter was in direct violation of the Pharaoh's command. Truly Proverbs 21:1 is true: "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He will."

After Moses grew up, he chose to walk by faith and follow God's calling in obedience. Moses made three choices to walk by faith:

1. By faith, Moses chose to identify with and suffer alongside God's people rather than "... enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:24-26).
2. By faith, Moses chose to leave the familiar of Egypt and went to the unfamiliar of the desert, choosing to follow God rather than Pharaoh.
3. By faith, Moses chose to do the strange thing God called him to do (keep the Passover and sprinkle the doorposts with blood to preserve the first-born in each family).





Each one of these faith actions required Moses and the people of Israel to surrender their will and plans to God and trust Him with the outcomes. It was not a board game on a card table on a lazy afternoon; it was life-and-death faith and trust in God's direction requiring surrender to His way, in His time, on His terms.

To us, it may sound like denying ourselves is really extreme; to the Israelites huddling in their houses awaiting the angel of death to skip their home during the Passover, it probably felt more like salvation than hardship, more like a "get to" than a "have to". As we grow in Christ and learn to abide in Him, our desires change, don't they? In his letter to the Philippian believers, Paul recounts all the supposedly "good" things he did in his life before Christ (Philippians 3:1-6).

In verse 7, Paul switches gears and shares his new perspective as a follower of Christ walking by faith: "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith..." (Philippians 3:7-9 ESV).

Counting everything as loss for the sake of Christ... this is Jesus' words to His disciples (and us!) as well: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24 ESV).

May we be "all in" for Christ as Paul was in his letter to the Philippian church.

# Week 6 - H.E.A.R. Method

*Hebrews 11:23-28*

## Highlight

Read with purpose, noting any verse that stands out. Write out the following: book name, scripture passage, a title summarizing the passage.

## Explain

Explain the passage's meaning by asking: Why was it written? To whom was it addressed? How does it fit within the context? What is the Holy Spirit communicating?



## Apply

Write how the passage applies to you with questions like: How does this help me? What does this mean today? Write 2 to 5 sentences on its relevance to your life.

## Respond

Write your response - this could be a commitment, an action plan, or a prayer based on what you've learned.

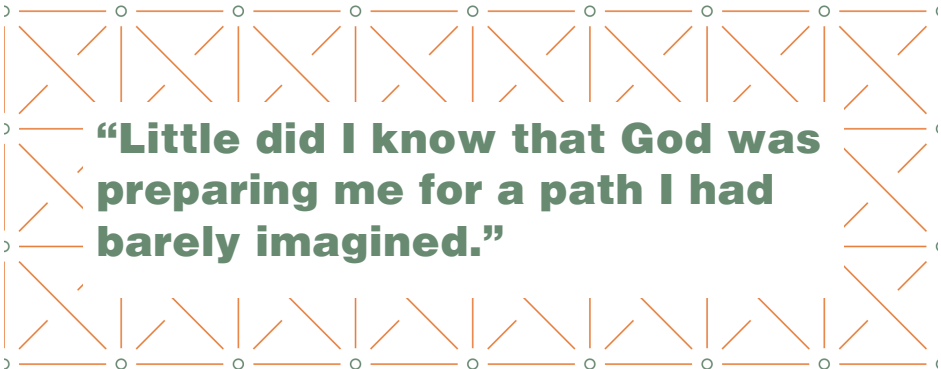
# Week 6 - Devotional

*Woody Burkhead*

Often in my life, I have approached situations and opportunities only thinking and planning my own strategies for the outcome I desire. And I'm guilty even today, as I still catch myself doing this at times. But as I've matured in my faith, I have recognized the need to invite God into circumstances on the front end, instead of asking Him to fix something that I did not seek His help with on the back end. Connecting in community with other believers, doing life together, and praying for one another has played a huge role in helping me understand the need for that change.

So let me just say...I love my church! I love serving in the church, I love coming alongside other believers in the church, and once upon a time, I even said I would love to work here at Westover in facilities one day.

That day was in 2014. I had been working in facilities management for nearly 14 years at UNCG, and I was burned out. I remember early that year starting to experience feelings of frustration in my role. I had many thoughts of all the things I disliked about my current job situation. And then, it just so happened that a similar role became available across campus in a different department. With the "the grass is always greener on the other side" mentality, I, of course, applied for the position. My new role would involve more responsibility, a larger staff, and a financial increase. And at the time, well, I would be lying if I didn't say that was my primary desire.



**“Little did I know that God was preparing me for a path I had barely imagined.”**

At the same time all this was unfolding, I just happened to also be working on a small renovation job at Pastor Don's (our previous pastor) home and was able to talk with him about this potential job change. He, of course, encouraged me to seek the Lord. My wife and I began praying, and I shared this prayer request with our Westover couples small group, and with the men's ministry group I attended. I invited God into the process. I wanted to allow Him to direct my path and to surrender to His will for my life. I was offered the new position across campus, accepted it, and turned in my 2 week notice. But that's not the end of the story.

Throughout that process, the prayers continued. My wife also asked me to develop a list of all the things that I disliked about my current job and another list of all I thought I could change or what might be better in this new role. I created the lists, and I began to pray for discernment as I began the interview process. I felt God working in me. I became more content, and I thought accepting the position was the answer I had been seeking. Little did I know that God was preparing me for a path I had barely imagined.

During the process, Westover was also looking to hire someone with a similar skillset. Even knowing I had accepted the new position, Pastor Don encouraged the deacon chair to reach out to me. Still praying, I met with and was offered the Director of Facilities position here at Westover. While certainly not at all the glamour or the financial gain I had just accepted, I knew the Lord had opened a door. Prayers continued and peace overwhelmed me. I graciously withdrew from the job I was about to begin, and launched into God's ministry here at Westover.

Ten years later I still recount that often my plans are not His. And I firmly believe that God opens doors and closes doors if we rely on Him for guidance and are willing to surrender our will for His.



## Week 7 - Commentary

This week, we move forward in Israel's history and begin with the Exodus of the nation of Israel from Egypt across the Red Sea toward the Promised Land (Hebrews 11:29-31).

The author of Hebrews then switches from full stories with names of the faith-heroes to thumbnail sketches of great people of faith that the Jewish readers would be familiar with, and would know the names of the people involved (Hebrews 11:32-34).

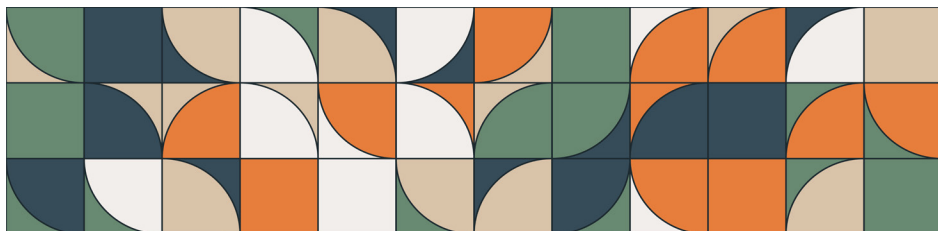
Before we try to identify the names of the people in the thumbnail sketches, let's pause a moment and consider the faith of the Israelite people required to cross the Red Sea with the water piled up on both sides, the faith of the people to march around Jericho as God instructed, and the faith of Rahab to trust God for rescue when their city walls collapsed.

These were monumental examples of faith, requiring both a leader to lead and a community to follow. God appoints leaders to walk by faith, not based on their skills or leadership abilities, but on their relationship with Him and their willingness to walk by faith and obey Him.

While Caleb and Joshua were military leaders, Rahab was not. All three had an extra measure of faith required to take action in extreme circumstances and bring others with them. So what about the thumbnail sketches?

Here is a quick reference of the person named, who that might have alluded to, and the Bible reference for it.

May you be encouraged as you read these stories of the faithful leaders and followers of God.



Barak	Judges 4 & 5
Samson	Judges 13-16
Jephthah	Judges 11 & 12
David	1 & 2 Samuel
Samuel	1 Samuel
Conquered kingdoms	Those mentioned in v. 32; also Joshua
Enforced justice	Samuel (1 Samuel 7:15-17); David (2 Samuel 8:15)
Obtained promises	Many examples - Judges 4:6-7; 6:12-16; 7:7; 13:5; David (2 Samuel 7:11-14)
Stopped the mouths of lions	David (1 Samuel 17:34-37); Daniel (Daniel 6:16-28); Benaiah (1 Chronicles 11:22); Samson (Judges 14:5-6)
Quenched the power of fire	Daniel 3 (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego)
Escaped the edge of the sword	David, when Saul was chasing him; also Elijah escaping Jezebel's murderous threats (1 Kings 19:2-ff); 2 Kings 6:31-33; Jeremiah 36:26
Made strong out of weakness	Gideon (Judges 7:7); the armies of Israel (1 Kings 20:27)
Became mighty in war	David; Gideon (Judges 7:7); the armies of Israel (1 Kings 20:27)
Put foreign armies to flight	David (2 Samuel), Joshua (Joshua)

# Week 7 - H.E.A.R. Method

*Hebrews 11:29-34*

## Highlight

Read with purpose, noting any verse that stands out. Write out the following: book name, scripture passage, a title summarizing the passage.

## Explain

Explain the passage's meaning by asking: Why was it written? To whom was it addressed? How does it fit within the context? What is the Holy Spirit communicating?



## Apply

Write how the passage applies to you with questions like: How does this help me? What does this mean today? Write 2 to 5 sentences on its relevance to your life.

## Respond

Write your response - this could be a commitment, an action plan, or a prayer based on what you've learned.

# Week 7 - Devotional

*Aaron Cooper*

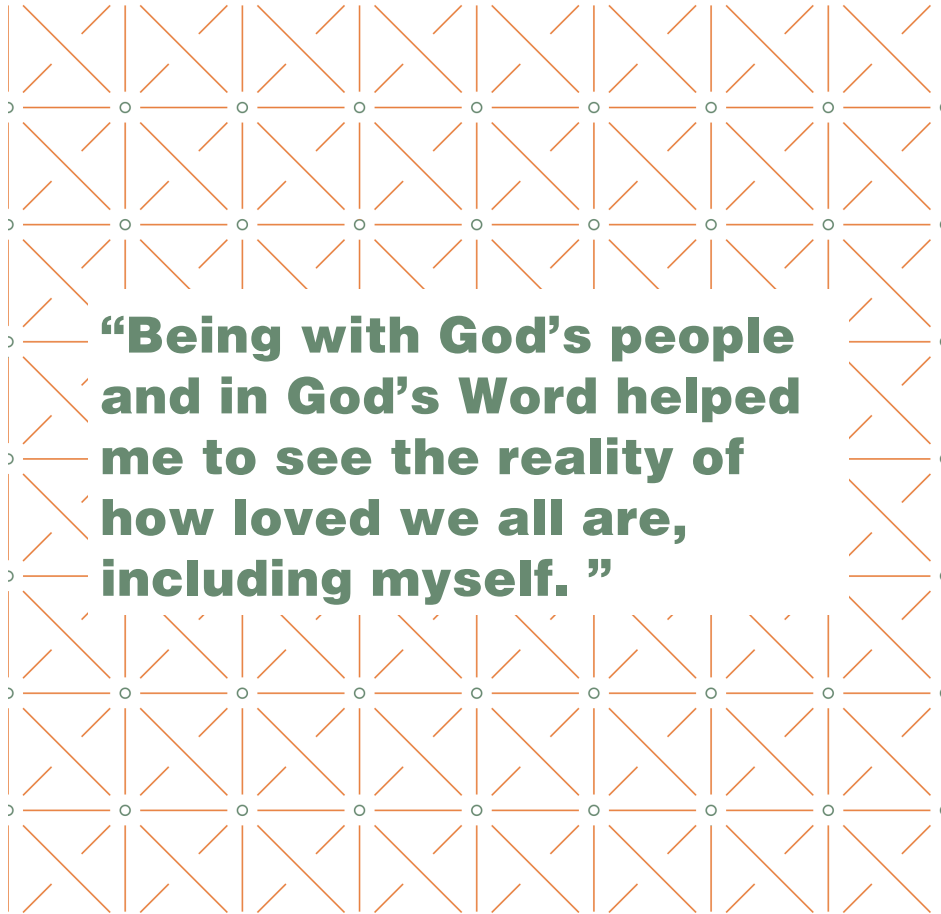
When I think of community, a lot comes to mind. Friendship, growing with people, accountability, being challenged, finding support, sharing ideas, staying focused and grounded, etc. All good aspects that have been helpful to me in my walk with God. A lot could be said for such a broad and impactful topic. One thing is clear, community is important.

For me, in life, and especially in college, there were plenty of difficulties and roadblocks. There was a constant surge of pressure - "achieve good grades," "participate in student organizations," "build friendships and have fun as expected for college students," "live a healthy lifestyle, exercise, and sleep." I can assure you, I balanced none of those perfectly. As a result there was always room for falling short of expectations. The risk here is certain, temptations for - "I am not good enough," "I am a failure," "I am not lovable." I encountered all of these in some capacity at one point or another. That cuts to the heart, an attempt to define my life and root my identity. We know however that these are all opposed to the gospel. Jesus offers to have our identity in HIM! Not our perceived lack of success for our own life goals.

Here is why community was so important in this circumstance - people helped me to see my worth in Jesus, and to follow His leading even when the future seemed messy, uncertain, challenging, and hopeless. It helped to uncover the lies for what they were, and remove them from my life. We would read Scripture together that showed me the truth "I am loved," "I am redeemed," "I am His." Being with God's people and in God's Word helped me to see the reality of how loved we all are, including myself. How beautiful! It helped me to turn over the pride in my life in how I cared about my own goals and direction rather than God's. My friends encouraged me, intently listened when I was struggling, reminded me of the fruit in my life, and more importantly, how loved I am. I say this because knowing who we are in Christ shapes the decisions we make for Him.

This was so impactful and personal, because it helped me to trust in God in a practical way. I took steps of faith to press forward in my degree and internship search. I took steps of faith to meet new people and make new friends. We as a community took steps of faith together to help the homeless in our city, share our faith with unbelievers, and serve in a local food pantry.

In my community I was able to see a lived-out example of how Jesus loves His people, and better understand my own value. I grew in my knowledge of the Lord, built leadership skills, learned to have faith discussions, and serve others. All good gifts that were made possible through the presence of community in my life. All of which I am grateful for.



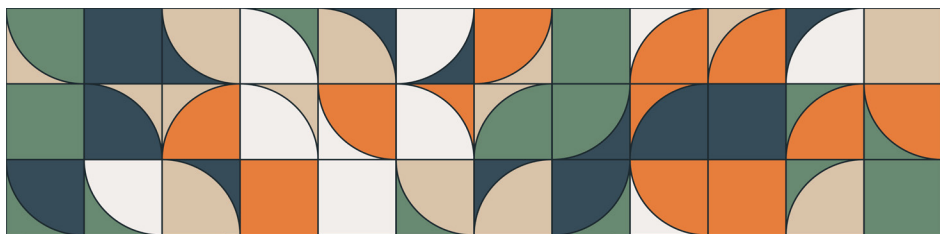
**“Being with God’s people  
and in God’s Word helped  
me to see the reality of  
how loved we all are,  
including myself. ”**

# Week 8 - Commentary

While last week’s text ended on a high note with incredible examples of faith and victory, Hebrews 11:35-40 lists the somber news of those found faithful. Let’s take a look:

Women received back their dead by resurrection	Elijah raised the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17-24); Elisha raised the son of a Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:18-37)
Tortured, refusing to accept release	Some attribute this to the story of Eleazar’s beatings in 2 Maccabees 6:18-31 (Extra-biblical)
Suffered mockings and floggings, even chains and imprisonment	Jeremiah 20 & 37; 2 Chronicles 16:7-10 and 36:15-16
Stoned	Zechariah (2 Chronicles 24:20-21)
Sawn in two	Jewish tradition - an extra-biblical account of Isaiah hiding in a cedar log, and King Manasseh ordered the log to be sawn in two with Isaiah in it
Killed by the sword	1 Kings 19:10-14; Jeremiah 2:30; 26:20-23
Went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated	Elijah (2 Kings 1:8); others (Zechariah 13:4)
Wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves	David and his men while Saul was chasing them; The prophets in hiding (1 Kings 18:4-13, 19:9)





From a human/worldly perspective, it seems most of these folks had bad outcomes; some would even question what these poor folks did to deserve such “punishment” (The world might say “it was karma”).

But the writer of Hebrews takes a completely different perspective of these people - an extremely high view of their willingness to suffer for God. Hebrews 11:38 gives us a glimpse of God’s high view of them: “...of whom the world was not worthy”.

God’s approval and commendation of these folks was not granted to them based on their merit, their achievements, their suffering - only because of their faith.

Our faith in Christ is not accidental; it is very intentional. The ultimate test of faith’s intentionality is demonstrated in victory over death.

Yes, the Jewish followers of Christ were being persecuted; that’s why the author of Hebrews wrote this letter and included these examples of Jewish heroes of the faith they would know of and relate to.

For us, all these biographical sketches of followers being persecuted for their faith were also exhibited in Jesus’ life. He was mocked, tortured, and even killed, yet He overcame death to live eternally.

May our faith be strengthened and may we abide in Christ, in the everyday challenges of life, in face of persecution, suffering, and even death.



# Week 8 - H.E.A.R. Method

*Hebrews 11:35-40*

## Highlight

Read with purpose, noting any verse that stands out. Write out the following: book name, scripture passage, a title summarizing the passage.

## Explain

Explain the passage's meaning by asking: Why was it written? To whom was it addressed? How does it fit within the context? What is the Holy Spirit communicating?



## Apply

Write how the passage applies to you with questions like: How does this help me? What does this mean today? Write 2 to 5 sentences on its relevance to your life.

## Respond

Write your response - this could be a commitment, an action plan, or a prayer based on what you've learned.

# Week 8 - Devotional

*Mike Blackwood*

In Hebrews, I like verses 32-35a in Chapter 11. Full of great deeds for God. But 35b and following, not so much. Why end a great treatise on trusting God with a parade of the horrific experiences of some. I want to camp out with the conquerors, verses 32-35a.

But just consider Acts 12. King Herod kills James, John's brother, 'with the sword' for political gains and then proceeded to arrest Peter. But Peter is miraculously spared by some angel work. Why such diverse outcomes to two equally "faith-full" men?

We don't live in a world unaffected by the fall of humanity. A reality that sometimes hits us face on.

I was coming home from work. It was 5:30 p.m., December 29, 2010. I noted as I drove in that the house was dark. This was unusual. Normally, Eleanor would have been busy preparing supper. She had not been feeling well for a few days, sore throat, cough, etc. I thought she might still be resting. Coming in, I went upstairs to the bedroom. It was also dark. I turned on a light and knelt by the bed. Her arm was cold and stiff. The reality of her death came fast and hard. My immediate response was to beat the wall with my fist saying over and over, "no, no, no."

C. S. Lewis described his response to his wife's death in this way, "You go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and the sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away."

But I had to act. I called my son-in-law, Doug, Bethanne's husband, and told him Eleanor had died. Bethanne called EMS, but I was sure that was fruitless, then I called Sarah (near by), then Rebekah (Michigan), then James (Alabama). Four times I had to repeat the reality I didn't want to admit.

Within the hour, the house was filled with strangers, EMS, firemen, sheriff deputies, neighbors, and family. I wanted them all (except family) to leave. Fortunately, from Westover, Don and Donna Miller and Bob Voorhees also came. When the other crowd left we just sat in the living room, saying very little. But it was not words but just their presence that spoke of “suffering together.” That night, when all were gone, the reality came in with undeniable force. For the first time since December 31, 1967, I was truly alone.

The first few weeks were consumed with arrangements and legalities. Then again, I was in a quiet, but lonely house. I frequently spent time walking in a park just ten minutes. I didn't return to church for three weeks. I don't remember being angry at God. I just didn't want to hear the question, “How are you doing”? How do you answer that in passing in a large group of people? But in time healing began. In C. S. Lewis' words, “There was no sudden, striking, and emotional transition. Like the warming of a room, the coming of daylight. When you first notice them, they have already been going on for some time.”

As life goes on, so do its challenges. In 2015, after six months of treatment, our daughter, Bethanne, died of cancer. Hundreds of people were praying but ... what we wanted most didn't happen. This of course, is not a complete or even a majority perspective of a life in trusting God's Son and His purposes. That account would run way beyond the space I was given for this story.

Should we not grieve, experience confusion, loneliness, ask God hard questions? Yes, read the Psalms, where honest people in dreadful situations ask God why? How long? Where have you been?

In our faith journey there will be these times. We do not need glib words. But God offers Someone who wept bitterly at the death of a friend but in His own death “swallowed up death in victory.” If we will, He will walk with us step by step, from the double bolted door to the light of dawn coming, at first imperceptible to our SENSES.