

FAITH ONE STEP AT A TIME

SERIES: STORIES OF FAITH,
HEBREWS 11



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Hebrews 11:23-31
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Hebrews 11:23-31

My name is Ray Kaestner. I have been serving as an elder for the last three years, making me the newest elder, but with Andy Burnham's recent retirement, I am now also the oldest elder. In another ironic twist, as the oldest elder, I am the elder for youth ministry and have been serving in Middle School Ministry here for a while.

For those who don't know me, our family came to PBC over 25 years ago. We have four adult kids who have grown up here at PBC. Now we have two wonderful grandchildren, with three more on the way.

We are continuing our summer series in Hebrews 11, and today we are going to focus on three individuals and their stories of faith. We will look at how God prepared them for the steps of faith that he was calling them to take for each of them. Your assignment for this morning is to listen to each story and see how you can relate to each one. If you are like me, you will probably find elements of each story that you can identify with.

Moses

We start this passage with Moses. In the spring we finished the sermon series about Joseph. At the end of the story, Jacob and his family all moved to Egypt because of the famine. The people of Israel multiplied and were enslaved in Egypt. Pharaoh became so concerned because there was so many of them that he ordered all the male babies to be killed. We'll start in Exodus 2 where it describes the situation in Egypt:

Exodus 2:23b-25:

During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. 24 And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. 25 God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.

This last phrase, "God knew", is so interesting. In some ways, it hangs there looking for a resolution. I am not a Hebrew scholar, but it seems like various translations struggled with what to do with it, and they use phrases like "God knew their condition" (RSV) or "God was concerned about them" (NIV) or "God took notice of them" (NASB).

In reality, I think that in the life of faith the statement "God knew" is sufficient. It indicates that God knows about the situation, and clearly he was moved by it. Also, in the life of faith we have to trust him and that he is in control. With that backstory in mind, let's go to our passage in Hebrews 11.

Hebrews 11:23:

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.

Moses' story was special from the start. The faith in this verse was from the parents of Moses. Moses' parents hid him away to protect him from Pharaoh's order to kill the babies. This act was described as an act of faith. I like their reasoning because the "child was beautiful." I think every parent can relate to this. I know each of our four children were beautiful. Our grandchildren were beautiful, and I am certain that our new grandchildren will also be amazingly beautiful. When you see a newborn infant, the beauty you see is not just from its physical appearance, but you are also looking at the future promise of things to come. That is what Moses' parents saw as they protected him.

Of course, any discussion like this needs to acknowledge that there are people who are struggling who would love to be parents, but for one reason or another, are unable to have children. To those people, I have two words for you: "God knows."

Moses' parents put him as a three-month-old baby in a basket in the reeds to be found and adopted and raised by Pharaoh's daughter. We quickly skip ahead in

the next verses in Hebrews to Moses as an adult, starting in verse 24.

Hebrews 11:24-27:

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. 26 He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. 27 By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.

Apparently, even though Moses was raised in Pharaoh's household as a child of privilege, he was aware of his heritage as an Israelite. In Exodus it says that he went out to where his people were. He went to see their suffering and hard labor. While he was watching, he saw an Egyptian beating one of the slaves.

Moses was upset about what he saw and felt he needed to do something. So Moses made a choice. Maybe it wasn't the wisest choice, but he chose. He killed the Egyptian. He wanted to be the one to help his people. But he found out that not only were the Egyptians not happy with him, but the people of Israel resented him. Instead of standing up and taking charge right there, Moses ran out to the desert to hide from everyone, and he hid there for 40 years.

This does not sound like a man of great faith, does it? Moses realized that his own personal authority wasn't worth much, so he fled. At this point, things do not look very promising.

But the writer in Hebrews sees faith even in this part of the story. What does he see? First, Moses shows that he has the heart of God—he goes out to see the suffering of the Hebrew people, and he is moved by it and disturbed by it. He saw what God saw and was disturbed by it, just like God. God knew. And now Moses knew, too. But he acted rashly and on his own.

In addition, as Hebrews indicates, Moses could have stayed in the palace, enjoying a life of comfort and ease, but instead, he chose a different path. The writer of Hebrews sees this is also his choice to step out in faith, to leave Pharaoh's household and act. God was preparing him for something big.

Moses wasn't ready yet to lead the people of Israel. So we see Moses spending the next 40 years in the desert tending the flocks.

After 40 years in the desert, he sees the burning bush and everything changes. God appears to Moses in the burning bush, calling him to go to Pharaoh. God sends Moses to set his people free. Moses has changed a lot from when he first went out and killed the Egyptian. His response to God this time was not, "Let's go!" but rather, "Who am I?". God calls Moses, but Moses keeps expressing uncertainty and doubt.

We don't have time to go into the specifics of his conversation with God in Exodus 3, but it is fascinating and worth more study. God does not chastise Moses or punish him for lack of faith. Rather, he encourages Moses. God gives gifts to help Moses (e.g., he gives him signs like the staff turning into a serpent). When Moses complains that he cannot speak clearly, God gives Moses a helper in Aaron to go and stand with him and speak for him. God lays out his plan for Moses to follow.

What was Moses' part in this? To take the next tentative steps of faith; to trust God to be faithful to his promises and let him do the rest. Yes, it was big. Yes, it was scary. But God promised to be with him the whole time and not to let him down. At each step along the way, you can almost sense that as Moses' faith continued to grow as he learned that he could trust God for the next step.

I am reminded of the words of Jesus in Matthew:

Matthew 17:20b:

"For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."

Moses may not have realized what was happening, but he started with that little bit of faith. It didn't start off pretty, but God was preparing him to move mountains. While we are talking about seeds, I am also reminded of what Jesus said in John 12:

John 12:24:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

In the context in John 12:24, Jesus was talking about himself, about his own death. In a sense, Moses started out in earnest to change the world in his own strength and, in effect, had to die to his initial vision before God could change him and really use him.

Were there setbacks along the way? You bet. But you could watch his relationship with God grow. The Moses at the end of the story is very different from the Moses at the beginning.

What about us? What is God calling us to do? Is it something big? Is it scary? Do you feel like Moses at the burning bush? Maybe there is a neighbor he wants you to talk to or reach out to that needs ministry. Or maybe someone at work. Maybe it is a family member. Maybe he is calling you to pray. Maybe he is calling you to give. Maybe he is calling you for a ministry at church. Maybe he is calling someone to go into full time ministry. Or maybe something completely different. Maybe he is just giving you the next step to take.

There is also a cautionary tale here as well—don't go off on your own and start killing Egyptians. Wait for God to lead. Wait for the gifts that he provides to do the work. If you make a mistake, go back to God and wait some more for him to give the green light,

There is another comforting lesson here. Moses was 80 years old when he went before Pharaoh after the burning bush. God is never done with us and it is never too late (or too early) to begin our faith journey.

If you are like me, you are much more like the cautious, hesitant version of Moses at the burning bush rather than the Egyptian-killing version of Moses. I have my doubts, I have my insecurities. It may not look like it, but even for teaching a sermon like this, I am way out of my comfort zone. But I also feel God is calling me to do this and I have to step out in faith, even in my discomfort, and God is faithful. Like Moses, as I step out in faith and act on his calling, he gives the gifts to help me obey.

God has a different calling on each of us and God has gifted each of us differently. As we take those initial steps of faith, we see his hand at work in us and it becomes easier to take the next step.

Hebrews 11:28-29:

By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn

might not touch them. 29 By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned.

Passover was a huge act of faith for the people of Israel. In some ways it was a simple act. They were just putting some blood on the doorposts. But it was an act of obedience, an act of faith, and one that saved the lives of their firstborn children.

Then there was the Red Sea. The author of Hebrews commends their faith for crossing the Red Sea, But remember before they crossed the Red Sea? They were hemmed in by the sea on one side and the Egyptian army on the other side. What is the people's reaction then? Are they trusting God to provide the way of escape for them? The people say this: "It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."

Even after seeing all that God had already done for them, the people were still not particularly faith-worthy. But when the Red Sea open up in front of them, they recognized that God was at work. However, they still needed to step out in faith to cross over to the other side. They celebrated when they reached the other side, but did their faith last? They quickly went back to their doubting, complaining ways.

Can we relate to the people of Israel? We take a step in faith, but then we go back to our old ways and don't continue on. Are we quick to whine and complain when things don't go our way? When you see someone who has been walking with God for a long time that is able to trust God even in those dark times., it is a wonderful thing. That is truly joy.

Joshua

We move to the next verse in Hebrews and we move on to the next part of the story.

Hebrews 11:30:

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.

Joshua's name is not in this verse, but it will be beneficial to include Joshua in our discussion of Jericho, since he is a central figure. While the people of Israel were wandering the desert for 40 years, Joshua was Moses' assistant. He spent many hours with Moses. Here is probably my favorite verse about Joshua and it talks

about his time with Moses. It talks about when Moses would go out to the tent of meeting to speak to God.

Exodus 33:11:

Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

We just looked at Moses relationship with God, and this verse highlights the growth of his relationship with God. Here, Moses speaks to God as his friend! But I love what it says about Joshua. After Moses had to get back to work, Joshua watched Moses' relationship with God, and he wanted to experience God that way, also. So Joshua lingered behind at the tent because he wanted to experience more of God also. That is a beautiful picture,

What about you? Who are your examples of faith? Are there people in your life that you can point to that are providing an example of faith? Do you have someone that cares about you, someone that is investing their life in you? Do you have someone that can be an encouragement, that can challenge you, and help you grow?

In this church, we have a history of emphasizing discipleship. Over the years, we have had lots of discipleship groups. The goal has been to pass along from one generation to the next, our relationship with God, our love of the Scriptures, and how to live by faith. Paco Lopez talked about this last week, and we are hitting it again with Joshua. The relationship between Moses and Joshua demonstrates that so beautifully.

As I look back at my life, I can certainly point to a wonderful group of people that I have learned from about trusting God. Sometimes that has been in a formal discipleship group or relationship. Throughout my life I have always looked for people older than me that walk in faith and that I can learn from and be discipled by.

Many times, it has been much more organic. Frequently it has been with people I have been in ministry together with. As we minister together, I have watched others as they demonstrate how to trust God, and let God work in them and through them. It is a powerful thing.

Now I find that am one of the older ones. But there are younger people around that I can invest in, just like

the many folks who have invested in me. I love doing middle school ministry because there are the students who are young and ready to learn more about God. But there are also my co-workers. Generally, they are indeed younger, and I can speak to them words of encouragement and words of life.

Are you hungering for more of God? Are you wanting to learn from someone else and be encouraged in your faith? Look for those people that can help you. If you are having trouble finding someone, we can help you find a group.

Or maybe God could be calling you to share the things he has taught you with others. Maybe he has placed people in your life that need encouragement and discipleship.

As for Joshua, you can see how this led to so much in his life. This was just the preparation Joshua needed to get ready to lead the people into the promised land, But it took 40 years of wandering in the desert. It was a long-term discipleship plan, not just a short-term commitment!

This passage in Hebrews talks about the fall of Jericho. For six days, the nation marched around the city once. Then on the seventh day, they marched around the city seven times.

Everyone was to remain silent on these marches except for the priests blowing the trumpets. When Joshua gave the signal, then the people were to shout, and the walls came down.

But by whose faith? It was up to the people to obey in order it make it happen. They had to step out in faith for seven days, following the instructions of the Lord. They were crazy instructions. Who would choose this for a battle plan? Their obedience was critical. But it took them 40 years in the desert before they were ready to take that step of faith.

Rahab

Finally we come to the last verse of our passage and the third character of the morning, Rahab.

Hebrews 11:31:

By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

I love that in this passage we have included Rahab. Moses and Joshua were powerful leaders in the history of Israel and we expect great examples of faith from the leaders.

Rahab is different She is not from the nation of Israel. She is an outsider. She comes from rough circumstances. She is not someone who is respected in the town.

Rather, she is someone that people looked down upon. Rahab's profession is clear from this verse. Almost every time she is referred to in the Bible, she is not just Rahab, but she is always Rahab the harlot, Rahab the prostitute, Yet even so, God had an important role for her.

Once the Israelites were in the promised land, Joshua sent out spies to see what they were facing. When the spies needed a place to hide, they found refuge in the house of Rahab. Somehow the king of Jericho found out and sent his men to her house to seize the spies and kill them. Rahab hid them and protected them and let them escape from her window out the walls of Jericho. Listen to the words of Rahab in Joshua 2 as she speaks with the spies.

Joshua 2:9-11:

[Rahab] said to the men, “I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. 10 For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. 11 And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

All of the people in Jericho knew of God and what he had done and were afraid because of it. What was the difference between them and Rahab? Perhaps it was because they liked their city, they liked their lifestyle and they wanted to hold on to it. They were ready to fight for it, but they were fighting against God.

Rahab recognized that salvation was only possible through putting her trust in God.

Maybe because she came from a place with nothing worth holding on to, so she could see more clearly that God was offering her a new beginning, a new life. So she acted on that. James says the following about Rahab

James 2:18,25:

But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

Here we learn another important aspect of faith. Faith changes how we live, faith results in works. Faith is not an intellectual exercise. It is not something that we can just talk about. For faith to actually be real—for it to actually mean something—it needs to make a difference in how we live our lives, You can't go on with business as usual.

If you are really putting your faith in God, the things that you do should demonstrate that.

As Rahab demonstrates, you don't have to be a powerful person, a respected person, a person with money. What it takes is a heart that is ready to follow, to take that step of faith. Sometimes it is just a little step and sometimes it is a big one. The result of her obedience was that she saved the lives of the Hebrew spies. In addition, her own life was saved when Jericho fell. Not only that, but the lives of the rest of her family were saved.

Additionally, she is listed in the book of Matthew. She had a son Boaz who was the great grandfather of David. That means that she is in the lineage of Jesus. Just like we saw with Moses, that small step of faith, that mustard seed of faith grew and turned into something big.

Can you relate to Rahab? Do you feel disrespected? Do you feel like no one is paying attention to you? Like you have nothing to offer? Do you think everyone else is better than you and that no one cares? It is easy to look around you and feel like everyone else has their lives together. Do you look at your own situation and feel overwhelmed?

Maybe you are going through tough times. Maybe your life is falling apart. Remember: God knows! Take

that step of faith. It doesn't have to be a big one. Trust God, let him show you what to do.

We've looked at three characters in Hebrews. We have seen them act in faith from where ever they were at. It has not always been pretty, it has not always been a smooth road, not an easy road. We have seen setbacks, we have seen victories. In our own lives, think about what God is calling you to do. Think about what gifts he has given you and how he is preparing you and leading you. Be willing to step out in faith.