

WHAT GOOD IS FAITH?

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Hebrews 11: 1-16



What does it mean to live by faith?

Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1). The Bible lists these people: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Rahab.

- Abel brought God a better offering.
- Enoch was taken from this life so that he did not

experience death; he was commended as one who pleased God.

- Noah built an ark and condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness.
- Abraham obeyed and went to the place he didn't even know; made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country.
- Sarah was enabled to bear children even though she passed childbearing age.

All these five individuals didn't receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from distance, admitting that were foreigners and strangers on earth (v.13).

It really intrigued me as I read this verse over and over. Yet this band of people who didn't get there still were listed as examples of faith. They are the examples of "confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."

Charles Swindoll made a commentary that caught my attention,

"At this point, the writer of Hebrews sets aside the palette of paints he had been using to fill his canvas with examples of faith. He steps back, as it were, gestures at the procession of personalities he's been painting, and makes a sweeping statement: "All these," he says, "died in faith, without receiving the promises". Wait . . . didn't Abraham make it to the Promised Land? Didn't Sarah have her promised child, Isaac? Yes, but what they experienced in this life was **merely a foretaste, a shadow of things to come**. Abraham didn't receive the full promise, just a down payment. Abraham and Sarah had only one child—the promise was for descendants "innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore" (11:12). The land in which he sojourned was indeed the Promised Land, but he, Sarah, Isaac, and all their household lived there as "strangers and exiles on the earth" (11:13; cf. 1 Pet. 2:11). (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary – Hebrews)

I guess Charles Swindoll's take away needs to be considered. These people of God didn't die in vain. According to Swindoll, they experienced in this life a foretaste, a shadow of things to come. They died in faith and left a trace to those after them of living worthy and worth-while lives on earth. Nevertheless, my heart is still restless, asking that if faith doesn't necessarily always bring us to get there, *what good is faith for those who choose it?*

What Good is Faith?

We are wired for this materialistic world. We touch, taste, hear, and see with our physical senses. We hear symphonies with our ears, we see the beauty of sunrise with our eyes, we hug our friends with our hands, and we enjoy delicious food with our tongue. Our humanness is very susceptible to make sense of things that are tangible to us.

Nevertheless, our world is not only about what our eyes can see. There's more to it. Those who define their life on materialistic things will always know that all things that the world could offer never satisfy deeply. There's always a constant restlessness lurking in the back, painfully throwing out the truth that always leaves them only two options: ignore it or chase it. Those who ignore the truth would find for themselves that everything is meaningless, a chasing after wind; nothing was gained under the sun (Ecclesiastes 2:11). Those who chase truth don't always end up following it because following it requires a full submission that not everyone is willing to do.

What good is faith? Faith is **confidence** in what we hope for and **assurance** about what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1). N.T. Wright wrote, "Our task in the present is to live as **resurrection people** in between Easter and the final day, with our Christian life, corporate and individual, in both worship and mission, as a sign of the first and a foretaste of the second" (*Surprised by Hope*). With faith that consists of confidence and assurance, the task is allowed to be done. Living "in the between" requires a reason beyond "the here and now", beyond what we can see with our eyes. Paul wrote, "*Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day... So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*" (2 Cor 4: 16& 18)

Jesus himself hints that on the later days when the Son of Man comes, faith will be scarce, "*However when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?*" (Luke 18:8)

What good is faith? Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. There's "stubbornness" and "conviction" in faith. But they are not stubbornness and conviction rooted in self, like we see in popular culture, encouraging people to believe in themselves when overcoming problems. Biblical faith requires a deep and personal relationship with the perfecter of faith. With such a relationship, we can remain still in the midst of tempests and convinced that there's no safer place on earth than being in the presence of the Lord. "*I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; apart from You I have no good thing....Lord, You alone are my portion and my cup; You make my lot secure."*" (Psalm 16: 2&5)

What good is faith? The Bible says *it's impossible to please God without faith*. As God's people, nothing is more satisfying than to please God. To please Him brings joy that transcends any circumstances – the here and now. When we please God, the excitement isn't defined by the pleasant results but by the act of pleasing Him with faith. Maybe it's more like singing with all your heart. People's applause never satisfies you deeper than when your soul finds its way to be free. I guess John Piper was right when he wrote, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him."

What good is faith? Faith expands our capacity to embrace the moment to its fullness. Only with faith are we aware of God's presence and His work even in the midst of discouragement, loss, and misery. When Paul endured many troubles in his life, he said, *"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."* (Phil 4:11,12).

Why Longing?

*"They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth... **They were longing for a better country – a heavenly one**"* (Heb 11:13,16)

Remember Daniel from the book of Daniel? Daniel was very young when he was exiled to Babylon. In his young age he embarked on a journey outside home. Coming from a privileged family background, he was deprived of his youthfulness and began a life of labor and hardships. Everything now was foreign in every way, not only the customs, the land, the culture, but also his identity. Being an exile, Daniel seems to straddle two worlds. On one hand, he longs to preserve his old identity; on the other hand, he has to adjust to his new context so that he can survive and thrive. By the hand of God, he became a high official in the Babylonian empire. Nevertheless, he kept something that had been carved deeply in his heart. Three times a day, with his windows opened toward Jerusalem, he would pray to God (Daniel 6:10). *I wonder what happened in the deepest of his soul during those lonely nights when he remembered his family and the good old days in Israel. What was his thinking about his present and future? Was he longing for something?*

There's a deep longing in between. Yet in between those two lands, there's a priceless treasure that we only understand when we're longing. In faith, longing is very crucial. Like a fire that burns, it also molds the people of faith to become stronger. Paul wrote, *"I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead"* (Phil 3:10).

Nevertheless, we are not abandoned to wallowing in our longing. In the revelation that John received from Jesus Christ regarding the church in Philadelphia, God rewards his frail yet faithful church, *"See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet **you have kept my word** and have not denied my name."* (Rev 3:8) And here's another thing about faith. Since it consists of confidence and assurance anchored in the deep relationship with the Lord, that heavenly longing somehow is an avenue to glimpse the eternity that has been set in our hearts. We might seem to not get there yet, but through faith we experience peace that transcends all understanding (Phil 4:7).

To live as resurrection people in between Easter and the Final Day: Walking Every Day with The Perfecter of Our Faith

I remember an old hymn by Charles W. Fry called *The Lily of The Valley*,

*I've found a friend in Jesus, He's everything to me,
 He's the fairest of ten thousand to my soul;
 The Lily of the Valley, in Him alone I see
 All I need to cleanse and make me fully whole.
 In sorrow He's my comfort, in trouble He's my stay;
 He tells me every care on Him to roll.*

*He's the Lily of the Valley, the Bright and Morning Star,
 He's the fairest of ten thousand to my soul.*

There's joy in following the Lord. It's not always an easy and happy journey. Yet we can be assured that we have a Savior who understands us, walks alongside us, lifts us up when we're down, and provides for us in His perfect time. He's the lily of the valley – the beauty ministering to our soul when we're weary; the Bright and Morning Star – who leads us in His gentleness and compassion; and the fairest of ten thousand – who never tires of reminding us that there's more to what we can see with our eyes.

I fully committed my life to Christ when I was 19. I'm 33 now. Lately, I thought about what I would be saying to the 19 years old me? I guess I would say this.

"Faith has brought me as far as wherever I am at now. You made a right decision when you committed your life fully to Christ. The journey has been amazing. It has been filled with a plethora of adventures, emotions, thoughts, mistakes, grace, forgiveness, hope, brokenness, healings, love, and people that I love and who love me too. Cheers to you because that decision made me who I am right now! Dude, I've been through a lot but in all things I experienced the Immanuel- God be with us- even when God seemed silent. Dude, I've learned a lot about longing for the Kingdom of God and tried as best as I could to put my faith in action. I know it's not always perfect. But I won't worry because the perfecter of faith is walking alongside me. My portion is to be faithful to what He has called me to do. Dude, I might not "get there", but the journey that I have with the Savior is more than anything to me. Among many options that you had back then, I would affirm that following Him is the most beautiful narrative of life that young men should make. Dude, let me say this again, "It's been an amazing journey!". Every now and then He comforts me along the way and I do experience "the foretaste" of things to come. I know the road ahead will not be smooth as I have had before, but I'll keep pressing on! You've started the journey, and now I'm gonna continue it. I won't be afraid coz I walk with the perfecter of our faith. And I know it's gonna be an amazing journey!"

All the Way Home by Jon Guerra

**Because you walked with me
 When I was just learning
 Because you looked for me
 When I ran away**

**When nothing else is certain
 It is all that I know**

You're gonna walk with me
All the way home

All the way home
Through rain or shine
All the way home
Right by my side

Because you walked for me
Down Calvary's road
You're gonna walk with me
All the way home

V2
Because You stood with me
When I stood at the altar
Because You cried with me
When my promises I broke

When I'm banished like a stranger
There's a door step I know
You're gonna walk with me
All the way home

The road is long
But there is a horizon
Where heaven meets the earth

The road is long
But I was made a traveler
Your love is my leader
And it's leading me

Group Discussion: What would you say to the younger version of you who just started the journey with Jesus?

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