

## It Takes Faith Part 14

Hebrews 11:32-12:3

We've come to the end of our journey through the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11.

Hopefully in these last 3 months you've gained some insight and inspiration from looking at the examples of what these men and women accomplished by faith.

In overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds and coming away victorious.

In being willing to make the ultimate sacrifice.

In choosing to obey regardless of the cost.

But these models of faith aren't just there for our fascination; the writer wants us to do something as a result.

### What should our response be after having looked at all these wonderful examples of faith?

#### 1) It takes faith to be all in

Heb. 11:32-38, *"And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground."*

Here the writer lists a number of others who exhibited faith.

You have people like Gideon

Who took on an army of Midianites and Amalekites that scripture says were as thick as locusts and whose Camels could no more be counted than the sands of the seashore with a mere 300 men and won!

You have David

who even though he was just a teenager, took on a fierce nine-foot tall warrior all the while having no armor and carrying no sword or shield. With a sling and a stone he toppled the giant.

These things do not happen without faith.

These are the examples we have so we would go and exhibit the same faith as they did.

We may never take on a literal giant but we will certainly have to face proverbial ones.

We may never have to take on a literal countless army where the odds are stacked against us but we will need to take on a massive spiritual army in our everyday spiritual battles.

But we are not going into battle alone.

We have the greatest warrior of all, Jesus, leading the way and fighting for us.

(vs. 38) - *"The world was not worthy of them"*.

The world was not worthy of their sacrifices and their love. Why?

Because it wasn't appreciated.

The world wasn't worthy because these people of faith continued to give of themselves over and over and it kept getting met with resistance and persecution.

Not that no one appreciated or showed gratitude but I'm sure the majority of them didn't.

No one in Noah's day had faith but him.

No one in Jericho had faith but Rahab.

Moses continued to have faith even though his own people were against him at times.

Maybe you're in a situation where no one around you has faith and it's a struggle.

Obviously you're never truly alone because you have Jesus and you have the church but there may be places, whether it be at work or school or even your own home, where the only one who believes is you.

You feel like it's you against the world.

You can take heart in knowing that you can make it.

Not only can you make it-but you can shine.

You can do better than just survive-you can thrive in your environment-despite the odds-despite the opposition.

It takes faith to continue to do the right thing when there are others around you who aren't.

And it definitely takes faith to continue to be loving and godly when people are not thankful for it. Because by faith we know that if no one else appreciates it God does and that becomes enough for us to continue.

But it especially takes faith to be godly and loving not just when people are unappreciative but when they're downright nasty towards you for it.

It's one thing to not acknowledge my godly act towards you, but when someone actually has a negative reaction toward me when all I did was be nice can provoke us to come out of character real quick.

Despite people's reactions I need to remain faithful.

That doesn't mean I need to continue to put up with negativity from certain people.

I may need to back away and keep it moving but it will take faith to not develop a bad attitude to where I give up trying with anyone else.

It takes faith to persevere when your love is met with hatred.

It happened to Jesus and the Apostles.

And, both Jesus and Paul warned it will happen to us.

Jesus told his disciples in John 15 that if they persecuted him (which they did) they will persecute you (us) also.

Paul said in 2nd Tim. 3:12 that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ will be persecuted.

Why does it take faith to deal with that?

Without the belief that God will never leave us or forsake us, without the belief that God will give me the strength to press on, without the belief that there's a greater purpose to be served, without the belief that there's the blessing of heaven waiting for me when this is all done then we would not persevere.

Not one person who we read about in Heb. 11 would be willing to endure or would not have received the miracles they did if it wasn't for their faith.

It's faith that enables us to not give up.

It's faith that causes us to stay true to Christ when it would be easier not to.

It's faith that convinces me all my pain and suffering is worth it.

It takes faith to keep a positive and optimistic attitude despite the suffering I'm going through.

Paul said in 2 Cor. 4:8-9, *"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."*

Paul went through a lot of persecutions but he saw the Lord rescue him from all of them until it was time to go home.

Paul's faith was such that it didn't matter what he had to go through because he considered his life worth nothing without knowing Jesus.

Therefore, whatever he went through was tolerable because he knew he had Jesus there with him.

We can have the same attitude. It's not easy to do but when we are going through something one of the best ways to maintain a good attitude is to think of Jesus.

To think of where we would be without him.

To think of what we have with him.

To remember how much he loves us.

To know we don't have to be afraid because of him.

To know that we can have the confidence that there is nothing we can't handle without him.

The people of Hebrews 11 faced many situations where they were challenged to believe the impossible.

They faced circumstances where had it not been for their faith they would've caved in to their fears.

Faith allows us to have courage.

Faith allows us to face our challenges head-on and overcome.

If we don't have faith we will not stand.

That's what was said to King Ahaz and the people when two other kings marched up to fight them.

Isaiah 7:2 says that their hearts were shaken. But the Lord told them, "be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood." But he warned him in Vs. 9, "If you do not stand firm in your faith you will not stand at all."

It takes faith to overcome our fears.

It takes faith to keep calm and not lose heart.  
It takes faith to stand up to the enemy.  
These heroes of the faith did all that-even to the point of death.

And it takes faith to give your all knowing you'll have to wait for your reward.  
39-40, *"These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."*

It takes faith to completely give yourself over to God's will on a daily basis when you won't receive your true reward in this lifetime.

It takes faith because you have to believe that all your work will not be in vain.

That all the sacrifices you made and all the effort you put into the kingdom's work will net an eternal benefit.

These heroes of the faith went through a lot of trials and tribulations and didn't waver in their faith.

They may have struggled now and then and had moments of despair as they fought the good fight but they always pushed through and pressed on.

They had faith that God's word was solid and that his promises were valid.

They exemplified the definition of faith stated in Vs. 1-they were sure of what they hoped for and certain of what they did not see.

## 2) Now what? (12:1-3).

What should I do as a response to reading about the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11?

Heb. 12:1-3, *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."*

*"Since we are surrounded".*

According to commentators the reference is to the Grecian games, in which the racers were surrounded by a vast multitude of spectators occupying the seats in the amphitheater.

Here the witnesses are those who have themselves run the heavenly race and obtained the reward of faith.

The examples of these great men and women of faith are there to show us that nothing is impossible for those who serve the almighty God.

God doesn't want us to simply read these stories, He wants us to make them relevant in our everyday lives.

The faith of those in the bible were meant to inspire us to believe we can do amazing things too-as God so plans.

The awesome events of faith should cause us to become motivated and pray, "God, use me like you did Gideon or David or Peter or Paul. Help me to have the faith and courage these people had so I can accomplish great things for you."

And we see how we can be successful in all this-by throwing off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

How well can we accomplish things for God when we're hindered and entangled? We can't.

Do you want to be strong in the faith?

Do you want to do great things for God?

Are you trying but it's not happening and you're wondering what the problem is?

I suggest that you ask God to reveal if something or someone is hindering or entangling you.

Galatians 5:7-9, *"You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. 'A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.'"*

Paul is talking about the church collectively here but the same principle applies to us individually.

When we allow a little yeast to enter in if we don't address it, it will eventually work through the rest of us.

When there's someone in our life who is presenting ideas that don't line up with biblical truth and we find ourselves entertaining their theories and philosophies we will be hindered, we will be slowed down, we may even stop running.

Sometimes we're not aware of what, or who, is holding us back.

But sometimes we do know what it is but we're struggling with throwing it off.

Satan wants to convince us that we can't throw it off.

He wants us to be riddled with shame and guilt so that we won't look to Jesus.

Sometimes the problem is we waver back and forth.

There are times when we fix our eyes on Jesus but then there are other times when we don't so in our frustration we conclude it's impossible to keep our focus on Jesus. Not true.

If we're told to fix our eyes on Jesus then that's what we've been given the power to do.

Hudson Taylor said, "Satan, the hinderer, may build a barrier around us but he can never roof us in so that we cannot look up."

No matter how hemmed in we feel Satan cannot prevent us from fixing our eyes on Jesus.

We need to believe that we can succeed in throwing off what hinders and entangles.

We need to understand that until we do we are holding ourselves back from receiving certain blessings and satisfactions that result from doing more of God's work and reaching new heights in the faith.

Fixing our eyes on Jesus.

When we're tempted we need to shift the focus from the thing we're tempted by to the one that brings us true joy.

When we're overwhelmed we shift our focus from the situation that's weighing us down to the one who lifts us up and enables us to face and overcome it.

When we're successful, in order to keep us from being focused on ourselves we need to shift our focus to Jesus-the one who is the author and perfecter of everything we are able to do.

It's only when our hearts and minds drift do we become hindered and entangled.

The reason Jesus wasn't hindered or entangled is because he kept his focus on the Father's will and his mission.

For the joy set before him. For the joy of completing the mission and for the joy of knowing what it would accomplish-the saving of souls-Jesus endured the severity of the cross. He endured the humiliation and the pain all the while keeping his focus on the mission.

We need to have that same focus in our lives.

We keep the focus on God's will for us. We keep the focus on our mission.

We keep the focus on the joy of what our mission accomplishes-souls being saved, the church being unified, the saints being edified and sanctified.

And we focus on our future joy-our heavenly inheritance.

Running this race without growing weary and losing heart will take determination and sacrifice.

Many times in scripture you'll see the phrase, "*The righteous will live by faith.*"

Faith is not just something we have, it should govern our whole way of thinking.

Our thoughts, actions and decisions are faith driven.

We see the world, ourselves, others...life itself through the lens of faith.

Because of the indwelling Holy Spirit we can now see beyond the visible and into the spiritual.

And part of seeing things through that lens is being able to believe in miracles.

To believe that nothing is impossible with God and that through him I can do whatever he asks of me is by faith.

I can even move mountains.

In Matthew 17 the disciples were trying to cast a demon out of man's son but they were unable to.

When Jesus did it they asked him why they couldn't.

*Matthew 17:20, "He replied, 'Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.'"*

He reiterated this later in chapter 21 when Jesus caused the fig tree to wither.

I don't think Jesus meant this literally or else no one has had this level of faith since I haven't heard of any mountains flying through the air.

So, if this is figurative then what does Jesus mean?

He's trying to encourage us by saying it doesn't take a lot of faith to accomplish big things.

Whatever obstacles in our lives that seem as immovable as a mountain we can move by faith.

We can face the challenges that seem as intimidating as climbing Mt. Everest.

We all have these mountains and only faith can remove them.

So we take the truth of Hebrews 11 and we answer the question of 'now what' in Hebrews 12.

The now what is to take these models of faith and emulate them.

We believe that God will give us the power to face whatever challenges he allows to come into our lives.

We believe that nothing is too great for God to handle and nothing is impossible for those who are his.

We too can part the sea and move the mountain.

We too can slay the giant and see walls collapse.

By faith we can do anything that God commissions us to do.