

A Personal Invitation to Walk with God

Turn with me to Hebrews 11.

Years ago, I had a friend of mine from camp that I hadn't seen in awhile call me and wanted to get together. I was excited and really looking forward to it. So we got together and were having a good time catching up and then she started telling me about a business she was doing call Amway. I not being from Michigan had never hear about it, and she gave me the sales pitch, and I was a little skeptical at first, so she said, let give some stuff to listen to. So I thought okay sure. So she gave me all these cassette tapes, which of course dates me a bit doesn't it. And the tapes were filled with people who were in Amway making good money and they were just telling you their stories. These people were good speakers and engaging, and as I listened to them, I found myself thinking, "I could do that!" So I signed up. I wasn't in it long, but one of things I did find quite fascinating is that what they used to help them keep believing they could do it when it wasn't going was well were theses stories of others who had gone before them who had succeeded. They kept sending you tape after tape after. Eventually, I quit because the reward of wealth itself, wasn't worth it.

As we walk through our own lives, like the original recipients of the book of Hebrews, there are times when life is just hard and perhaps we start to drift away a little and we wonder if this Christian life is really worth it. The stories of Hebrews 11 boldly proclaim absolutely!

If you look at Hebrews 11 in its context, it is sandwiched in between two sections Hebrews 10:32-39 and 12:1-11 in which the author addresses the suffering and trials that his readers have endured and are enduring. Hebrews 11 being right in the middle is intended to breathe life into our exhausted souls in the middle of the struggles we endure.

So if you have come here today weary, or depressed because of life right now, if you have a smile on your face, but inside you are just struggling to hold it together, perhaps you didn't want to come this morning and you came anyway out of desperate hope that perhaps God would in some way help you. If deep down your life feels numb or empty. God sees you, and you are here even now because He loves you and He wants extend a personal invitation to you to help you on your journey, and my prayer is that you leave here with the encouragement that only God can give.

Let's Pray.

Take a look with at Hebrews 11 and I will read verses 4-12.

Read Hebrews 11:4-12

Throughout this chapter we are introduced to people in the OT who lived by faith in God. And for each person the author of Hebrews begins with the words, "By faith." If you are using an NKJV or an NIV this is really easy to see because "By faith" begins a new paragraph. As a result, it can be easy just to see this as a progressive list of people one right after the other.

Now if you have an ESV or an NASB, our passage is actually divided up into 2 paragraphs the first being in verses 4-7 which suggests that there is some unity there. Just a side note for Bible Study, different

translations follow different rules for creating paragraphs, and you can often outline a passage by using them, and even see different interpretations depending on differences in the paragraphs

If you have taken the hermeneutics class or were here last time I spoke, you may recall hearing about a weird word called a chiasm. A chiasm is based from the Greek letter Chi which just looks like an X and that X is kind of picture of two arrows pointing to the center. When authors in scripture want to emphasize something, they will sometimes structure what they say in such a way to draw attention to the center. Verses 4-7 actually form a chiasm that points us to really focus in on verses 5-6. So generally it looks like this:

Verse 4 – “By faith Abel...was commended as **righteous**

Verse 5-6 – “By faith Enoch...”

Verse 7 – “By faith Noah...became an heir of the **righteousness** that comes by faith.”

Abel and Noah are the only ones in chapter 11 are said to be rewarded with righteousness as a result of their faith. Why is that? After all, Abraham of all the people on this list would have been the easiest one to use to make that point. The reason for this is that the author uses Abel and Noah in a chiasm to point us to Enoch and a truth that flows from Enoch’s life in verse 6. And he does this I believe so that we will see how everyone else in this chapter lived their lives in light of this truth and therefore encourage us to do the same.

And the encouragement that we will be given is this: **Draw to near to the God who will always be because He is a rewarder to those who seek Him.**

Now in light of our chiasm rather than starting in verse 4, I want to start by diving into verses 5 and 6, which we will be primarily focusing on.

Draw Near... Read Hebrews 11:5-6

If you read through the genealogy in Genesis 5, we read over and over, so and so was the father of such and such and he lived so many years and then he died. Enoch’s genealogy sounds similar to everyone else’s except for couple key differences verses.

Genesis 5:21-24

When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah. ²² Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. ²³ Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. ²⁴ Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

What jumps out right away is as the author of Hebrews says, Enoch never died. But we are also told why: He walked with God.

Raise your hand if you like to go on walks?

In our culture some walk for exercise, but more often people walk together in order get away from all the distractions that are calling for their attentions so that they can connect relationally and share their hearts.

We could have been told that Enoch followed God, which of course would have meant he was obedient. Certainly Enoch lived an upright life. After all you can't have a relationship with God and live wickedly. However, the word picture isn't primarily focused on obedience. It is focused on relationship. When you walk with someone you are side by side so that you can see each other face to face.

So when it says, "Enoch walked with God" we understand that Enoch was a man of prayer, and man who truly loved God.

Even further, Genesis 5:22 tells us that Enoch walked with God for 300 years! Not only that Genesis 6 suggests that he did this in the midst of a wicked world that was getting worse and worse all the time. Nevertheless Enoch drew near to God and faithfully walked with Him. As a result God rewarded him by bringing Enoch directly into His presence without having to taste death.

You can see the seeds here of the main point that is being made in our passage, that God is a rewarder of those who seek Him, who walk with Him!

Now look back at Hebrews 11:5-6 again with me with this in mind.

We are told Enoch pleased God, and for us recovering legalists most of us immediately think "obeying God," "doing the right thing." We don't immediately think of intimacy or relationship, but notice the words of verse 6 closely. *"Without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would draw near to God* **Let's stop right there!** Did you catch the parallels? "Pleasing God" is the associated with "drawing near to God" which is a relational term. Pleasing God is actually relational in nature as well. For some of us it has just taken on a negative connotation. But when you really love someone, you want to bring them joy, you want to bless them, you want to please them.

I love my wife, and because I do when I think about some way to communicate that, I often tend to think of some grand way...but of course the big ideas aren't always practical or possible. But nevertheless, when we love someone, there is this desire to really bless them and give them pleasure, to please them!

The point I want you to see here is that these are relational terms! The very purpose of our faith is to lead us to draw near to God because He is a God who desires to be near to us.

Then the author lays out a general truth that flows from Enoch's life: "Without faith, no one can please God," then we are told two things that are needed in order for someone to draw near to God that are faith based. (1) First, he must believe that God exists.

That can be a hang up for many right there, I mean how do we know for sure that God exists? Isn't faith really just a blind leap? After all, it isn't as verse 2 says a conviction of something not seen, something we really don't have evidence for? We could easily spend the rest of our time and then some dealing with this issue, which is really a bit of a rabbit trail that deals more with modern issues than the God's intention through the author.

So I'm just going to address this briefly and if the subject interests you, talk with me and maybe we connect further about it. The faith that God calls us to is not blind like our culture thinks.

One of the wonderful blessings about our faith, is that it is actually based on testable evidence. Unlike some religious philosophies like Buddhism that are just proverbs, the Bible actually claims to be historical fact, and as such it is testable. It can be tested using archeology. It can be tested by other historical documents that speak of the same events. It can be tested by the reliability of its manuscripts. In the New Testament in particular the authors used evidence to prove their claims much of which include eye witness accounts which themselves can be examined to see if they are credible. And Jesus Himself came performing many signs and miracles as evidence for who he said he was and he encouraged people believe what he said on account of them. Our God gives us all this evidence because He Himself is truth, and He wants us to be base our faith on truth, not feelings. Bottom line, God has made His Word extremely testable and nothing has yet arisen by these and other tests that have undermined the Bible's credibility. Rather the amount of evidence is so great that that if someone is honest with it, they can't help but accept it as true.

Alright, let's get back to the main focus. We are told again there are two things that are needed in order for someone to draw near to God that are faith based. The first, "he must believe that he exists" literally reads that we must believe that "He is," which is an illusion back to Exodus 3:14. There God is sending Moses back to Egypt and Moses says, "what if the people ask what your name is, what should I say?" And God gave him the name YHWH which is usually translated, "I am."

Now in the literal Hebrew, YHWH actually means, "I will be." The translation, "I am" comes I believe from the idea that He will always be as he as always been. That is He never changes and always exists. He is the God who will always be.

But there is more! God reveals Himself as, "I will be" for the first time there in Exodus 3, I think as if He is saying, "wait to see who I will be." In other words, His name is like an invitation to Moses and all Israel to draw near to get to know who the always living never changing God is.

Now we get to the real heart of this in Exodus 33 and 34 where God says quite clearly what YHWH means and how He will always be!

Exodus 33:18

⁸ Moses said, "Please show me your glory." ¹⁹ And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.'

Exodus 34:5-7

The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. ⁶ The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

When ever we see written in the OT the name YHWH, translated the Lord, this write here the meant to be our foundational understanding of who the everlasting never changing God always will be. This is a God who deeply desires to be near to His people, why else would He describe Himself as merciful, gracious, loving, and forgiving?

Yet, we also see here a God who is just! He will not let the guilty go free, and these two traits come together in their fullness in Christ who took on all our guilt, all our debt, and paid it all Himself, showing at the same time what is most emphasized here in Exodus 34, our God is abundantly abounding in faithful love, grace, and mercy!

Now the very next line in Hebrews 5:6 flows right from this. Not only must we believe He is, but that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. The ESV reads, he rewards those who seek, but the word translated rewards is actually a noun meaning rewarder again describing who our God is and always will be, which is what Hebrews 11 is trying to show us through all those mentioned in this chapter, and therefore encourage us as we suffer that our suffering is not in vain, our enduring is not in vain, therefore don't drift, instead **draw near to Him, because He is a rewarder of those who seek Him!**

And what is our reward?

The whole focus here is on God Himself. To the one who seeks God, God blesses them with Himself.

I love James 4:7-8, "Resist the devil and He will flee from you, draw near to God and He will draw near to you." That's a reward and promise for this life, but also for the next just as Enoch's reward was to be brought into the very presence of God.

So often I think we see our eternal rewards from a materialistic American perspective. We can tend to focus on what the New Heavens and New earth are like, and the kind of things we will get to do there as if and all the things we will have as if glory will simply be the fulfillment of the American dream. Now I believe those things will be ours, but they aren't the fullness of the reward.

Even here on earth what is that kids want most from their parents? Is it things? No, they want quality time. And what person who ever lived has wished at the end of their life that they worked harder and had more stuff? What we all really long for are relationships. Yet the relationships we do have, broken as they are, leave us desiring more. They lead us to draw near to the one who will always be faithful steadfast love and rewards those who seek Him, with the greatest of gifts, to know personally and walk with the living God.

When we understand this, our chiasm makes more sense. Why is that we have two men Abel and Noah who are given righteousness on each side of this profound truth? Because in order to enter into His presence, what we need most is to be made righteous, and righteousness is the very reward God gives those who seek to draw near to Him by faith.

And how do we know that this is true? How do we know that if we draw near to God, that He will be a reward to us who seek Him?

To us God says, "Look at Abel," yes He died, but the fact that His life still testifies to His faithfulness reveals that God exalts those who draw near to Him, that He is a rewarder of those that seek Him.

God says, "Look at Noah," He alone drew near to God in the midst of entirely wicked world, and He alone was rewarded with life!

He says, "Look at Abraham and Sarah," God said if they would walk with him and they did, then he would make them a great nation and all the nations of the earth would be blessed through Him. And God did just what He said He would do, because He is the God who will always be, and that means He will always be a rewarder of those who seek Him.

Therefore, **let us draw near to God who will always be, because He is indeed a rewarder of those who seek Him.**