

**Title: Building a Life of Faith**  
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**Text: Hebrews 11**  
**Preacher: Rev Stu Cameron**

After 22 years of marriage I have worked out what makes my wife happy. When it comes to flowers, Sue believes in quantity before quality. She would rather I give her ten supermarket bunches of flowers than one expensive florist arrangement. Good to know. On the other hand, she enjoys quality time even more than quantity time. For example, I know that if we have a date night, tuning into sport on TV and tuning her out will not win me any credit. No credit whatsoever. I believe that I can multi-task – that is watch football AND give her my undivided attention. She is not convinced.

A critical question for any person who follows Jesus this: How do we please God? How do we make God happy?

Do we please God by giving lots of gifts – like a husband giving his wife flowers?

Do we please God by spending lots of time with Him – in prayer, at church or reading our bible?

As important as spiritual disciplines and giving are - I do not think ultimately these are the means by which we please God.

The writer of Hebrews says this:

Without faith it is impossible to please God.  
(Hebrews 11:6)

The corollary of this statement is that it is a life of faith that ultimately pleases God. This begs the question as to what is faith. Here again the writer of Hebrews gives us a very clear and succinct definition:

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.  
(Hebrews 11:1)

Here is a verse we would all do well to get into our spirit, to memorise. Say it together with me...

The writer of Hebrews doesn't just give us a wonderful textbook definition of the sort of faith that pleases God. For the next chapter – for 40 wonderful verses – he paints a picture of biblical faith using the lives of Old Testament saints as examples. In Hebrews 11 we have the great Hall of Faith where the lives of Old Testament heroes are held up as examples for us to emulate.

What do we learn from their example? First, we learn that:

### **Faith is Believing God when we don't see it**

Noah is one of the earliest members of the Hebrews 11 Hall of Faith:

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.  
(Hebrews 11:7)

Most of us know the story of Noah. Since the time of Adam and Eve, humanity had sunk into deeper levels of depravity and wickedness. Noah was the only man on the face of the earth who still found favour with God. Noah walked with God, just like Adam used to walk with God in the Garden. And so before God sends a flood, out of his gracious love, He commands Noah to build an ark for him and his family and for two of every kind of animal.

Nothing like a flood had ever happened before. There was not a cloud in the sky. A boat like Noah's had never been built before. He was miles from any water. It doesn't take much to imagine the ridicule of his neighbours as Noah faithfully gathered the materials, built the boat to God's specifications and marched animals into it two by two.

Noah could not see a cloud, rain or a flood and yet he believed what God told him.

Faith is believing God when we don't see it.

Recently I have been reading the history of the four churches that came together back in 1994 to form this one church. We will be honouring the stories of each of those churches over the next couple of months.

One of the four churches was Scots Memorial Presbyterian Church. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 1959, 30 enthusiastic Presbyterians (is there such a thing as an 'enthusiastic Presbyterian'?) met and formed the Surfers Paradise-Broadbeach congregation. Just over two weeks later, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 1959, they held their first service in the Blue Room of the Surfers Paradise hotel.

56 people were at that first service. Less than a year later they were meeting in the Surfers Paradise theatre and a year later they were meeting in the Cha Cha Restaurant in Cavill Avenue. Three homes in three years. And don't you love a Presbyterian Church meeting in a place called Cha Cha. Who says we Presbyterians can't have fun!

Here is the really cool thing though. In January 1960, a month after the church started, Sir Bruce Small donated a large area of land on the Isle of Capris for four churches to use. Six months later, on 12 June 1960 a parcel of land was dedicated as a future site of the Scots Memorial Presbyterian Church. The story of God's provision does not end there. Other land donated to the church was sold and the proceeds helped fund a new church building at the Isle of Capris.

On the 30 June, 1962 the Governor of Queensland opened the new church building in a service attended by 350 people – less than three years after 30 enthusiastic Presbyterians heard God's call and planted a new church for people they did not know, on land they did not yet have in a building they could not see.

Faith is believing God when we don't see it.

Martin Luther King was famous for being a dreamer who, by faith, saw many of those dreams become reality. He said this:

Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase.  
(Martin Luther King Jr.)

### **Faith is Surrendering to God when we don't understand it**

Perhaps the most dramatic story in the Hebrews Hall of Faith is that of Abraham and Isaac. We read:

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice.  
(Hebrews 11:17)

The story is shocking. Isaac is Abraham and Sarah's miracle baby. Instead of being pensioners, by God's grace, they became parents. Not only was Isaac a miracle baby he was also a child of promise. It was through Isaac that God would fulfil his promise to Abraham that he would have as many descendants as there are stars in the night sky. But God asks Abraham to sacrifice the boy – to kill him. With a heavy heart and terrible resolve that is what Abraham prepares to do - right up to the point of preparing an altar with wood ready for the offering fire. Then and only then does God intervene - sparing Isaac's life – essentially bringing Isaac back from the dead.

Abraham surrendered his will to God, even though he could not possibly understand it.

We are used to navigating this world by our senses – sight, touch, taste, hearing. But if we are to live a life that pleases God, we will not be controlled ultimately by our senses, even sometimes what seems to be ‘common sense’ but by faith. The Bible says this of those who would follow Christ:

We walk by faith, not by sight.  
(2 Corinthians 5:7)

I have shared before how coming to Queensland five and half years ago did not make sense to me at many different levels. To come here we would need to leave behind family and friends, a great church, a reputation I had developed over many years, our networks, a new and exciting ministry role for me and a higher earning capacity. For weeks I struggled against God’s sense of call. But God spoke to me clearly and succinctly then as he had before. He said to me, ‘Stuart I call you to be faithful, not successful. Follow my call and let me look after the rest.’

I believe firmly that along the journey of faith every Christ follower, and indeed every church community, will have defining moments, crossroads moments where we have the opportunity to walk by faith, not by sight – to surrender to God even when we might not fully understand.

I asked Sue this week if there had been an occasion where she had sensed God call her to do something, and she obeyed, but at the time it just did not make sense. She told me, ‘Sure, when God told me to marry you!’

Some of us are at personal crossroads, defining moments. It might be in your career, in a relationship or with your finances. It doesn’t matter. In whatever area, you sense God’s calling, but with your common sense sight it doesn’t make sense. My prayer is that in this holy moment you might choose the road less travelled – the way of faith.

### **Faith is Persisting when we don’t feel like it**

With Abraham, Moses is the great patriarch of Old Testament faith. Hebrews tells us that:

By faith (Moses) left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.  
(Hebrews 11:27)

Moses had a dysfunctional childhood, was a violent and confused young adult and was called by God as he hid in the wilderness. God called him to lead a large, rebellious, often complaining, frequently faithless, always demanding nation out of generations of slavery and bondage in Egypt. There were many times through the whole Exodus when he could have given up, in fact where he wanted to give up. But Moses persisted.

Moses persisted, Hebrews tells us, because he fixed his on the one that only those with the eyes of faith can see.

Too often great adventures for God never turn the first page because people are confronted with problems or resistance or their own fear.

Gary Haugen is a lawyer and the founder of the International Justice Mission. When he was a young boy his father would take him and his older brothers on hiking adventures in the mountains of Washington State, and in particular the day walks around a place called Paradise Meadow. On one occasion Gary’s dad suggested they all leave the asphalted tracks for the rocky trail that headed up to the base camp of Mount Rainer that rises to over 14,000 feet. His brothers were excited, but all Gary could see wasn’t the adventure ahead, but everything that could go wrong. Signs written by lawyers warned of everything that could go wrong. Gary worried and doubted and was looking for a way out. So when his Dad asked whether he was coming with them, he gave the standard ten-year old response, ‘No, that looks boring!’

So as his father and brother headed up the mountain on their adventure, Gary stayed behind in the Paradise Visitor Centre. For the rest of the day he explored every corner, every display the centre had. For a while it was fun, but after not too long it was boring. While he was totally safe there – he was also totally stuck.

After many hours his father and brothers returned from the mountain. They were hungry and thirsty and full of stories of the day. As they talked, Gary told them what a great day he had at the visitors centre. But as they all travelled home in the car he could not help but think what while he had been on the trip, he had missed the adventure.

But the message of Hebrews is that biblical faith is not just something we believe, but an all-encompassing lifestyle that we live. Frederick Buechner said this of what often passes for Christian faith:

You can sincerely believe there is a God and live as though there isn't.  
(Frederick Buechner)

The fact is, born out by one biblical example after another; if we attempt great things with and for God we will strike opposition. We will encounter problems that will at the time seem insurmountable. It is in these times that biblical faith comes into its own.

Biblical faith persists even when we don't feel like it. When we feel like giving up, when we think it is all too hard, when we feel all alone.

Moses was able to persist only because he fixed his eyes on God. While turmoil raged all around him he had a fixed and steady point of reference that enabled him to navigate through the storms.

You will only be able to achieve the things God wants to do in and through you as you steadfastly fix your eyes on God.

Through this season of change and transition, our church will only be able to fulfil God's calling as we fix our eyes on him.

On day six of the Apollo 13 Lunar Mission, the astronauts needed to make a critical course correction. If they failed, they might never return to Earth.

To conserve power, they shut down the onboard computer that steered the craft. But even without the computers, they still needed to steer their capsule through a thirty-nine-second burn of the main engines if they were to continue their journey home.

How could they steer without their normal controls? Astronaut Jim Lovell determined that if they could keep a fixed point in space in view through their tiny window, they could steer the craft manually. That focal point turned out to be their destination--Earth.

So for thirty-nine agonizing seconds, Lovell focused on keeping the earth in view. By not losing sight of that reference point, the three astronauts avoided disaster and made it safely home.

We can always persist, we can always persevere, we will always and in every circumstance be more than conquerors as we fix our eyes on Jesus – the one who has gone before us.

Faith persists as when we do not feel like it as we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

### **Faith is Obeying God before we receive it**

Joshua had just led the people of Israel into the Promised Land. The first Canaanite city they come across was the heavily fortified city of Jericho. While the Israelites stared at the high, impenetrable walls, God speaks to Joshua:

Then the Lord said to Joshua, 'See I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its mighty men.'  
(Joshua 6:2)

God says Jericho has been given to Israel even though it is still occupied by Canaanite soldiers bent on Israel's destruction.

God says Jericho belongs to Israel. That is a fact. The next step is for Israel to receive what God has given.

God gives by grace; Joshua and Israel receive God's gift by faith through obedience.

God gives instructions to Joshua. And the instructions are weird to say the least. The battle will not be won with swords and spears, but with silent marching, trumpet blasts and shouts of praise. Not exactly weapons to strike fear into your enemies – weapons of mass destruction. But Joshua obeys, and following his example, so do the people. Hebrews tells us that:

By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days.  
(Hebrews 11:30)

It is really important we note the sequence of events here.

God gives Jericho to the Israelites while it is still occupied by the Canaanites.

Israel received God's promise as they obeyed God's commands.

Faith obeys God before we receive it.

Put another way, God gives by grace; we receive by faith.

Four years ago God gave us a big dream; to be a church that plants five more worshipping communities by 2021. In the most unexpected way that dream began to bear fruit when Crossroads Helensvale began. Now every Tuesday 80 people pack into Helensvale Baptist church. God is good. Crossroads Helensvale is number one baby of the five God has promised.

We are about to give birth to baby number two. I am so excited to report to you that last week the Elders approved the site of our second church plant.

(Interview Orrell)

God gave us the dream and now as we have obeyed, God has given us the means to see that dream fulfilled.

Let me remind you how God has provided:

- Last year we went looking for a Church Plant Minister. There were people we wanted to talk to but all the doors were shut. Only one door was open to us, but it was the right door. And so God has provided us Orrell and Christine, who have successfully planted two churches already and will plant our second.
- Church planting is an expensive business. We calculated we needed an additional \$100,000 over and above our normal offering just this year to make it work. We are not half way through 2011 and already God has provided more than \$150,000. Our God will supply all our needs according to his riches in glory!
- We needed a venue. Orrell looked and looked, and then looked again. We were getting desperate. And then just a month or so ago we discovered that a new school hall was being built. Not only that, the school was a joint project of the Uniting, Catholic, Apostolic and Anglican churches. Not only that, the principal can't wait for us to start. God is good!

Next, God is going to provide the people Orrell needs to lead this new community – people willing to serve. God will provide musicians, Kidzlife volunteers, set up and pack up crew and a host of others. Perhaps God might surprise you by

whispering to you, even now, that this is where He is calling you. If that is the case, whatever you do, don't miss out on the adventure.

God gives by grace, we receive by faith.

Faith is obeying before we receive it.

Let me summarise. Hebrews 11 tells us that:

- Faith is believing when we don't see it.
- Faith is surrendering when we don't understand it.
- Faith is persisting when we don't feel like it.
- Faith is obeying before we receive it.

Over the forty verses of Hebrews 11 the writer has invited us to sit back and watch the instant replay screen as he reminds us of the exploits of the heroes of faith that have gone before us. Up to now we have been spectators watching on. In Hebrews 12 the roles are reversed. The heroes of the past in the Hebrews Hall of Faith now sit back and watch as we take up the baton of faith and run our race. And so Hebrews 12 begins with what I have always called the most dangerous, terrifying and yet exhilarating word in the Bible; therefore!

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw of 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.

(Hebrews 12:1-2a)

Let me let you in on a terrible truth; Christian faith is not a spectator sport. We do not sit back in the stands and clap politely as others step on to the arena and run the race. We are called down from the stands onto the track where we run the race that God has called us to run at this time in this place – and to run that race in his strength and for his glory.

For every member of the Hebrews 11 Hall of Faith there were defining moments; crossroads where they had to decide whether they would choose to trust God or not.

Faith is the assurance of things hope for, the conviction of things not seen.

Faith is belief enacted.

By faith Noah built an ark when there was not a cloud in the sky.

By faith Abraham and Sarah became the parents of a nation whose population is more than the number of stars in the night sky.

By faith Moses led the people of Israel out of slavery, through the Red Sea and wilderness and to the verge of the Promised Land.

By faith Joshua led the people in Israel in the strangest march ever recorded and their reward was the rout of Jericho.

But the story does not end there...

By faith 30 enthusiastic Presbyterians heard God's call to plan a new church community and God provided for them as they obeyed.

By faith a handful of faithful Methodists raised the funds to build a new church in the heart of Surfers Paradise. And so with the world at war, Surfers Paradise Methodist church was opened on December 14, 1940.

By faith some families responded to God's call to plant a church at the new Bond University campus near the vacant fields of Robina. Varsity Lakes was not even a suburb yet.

All by faith.

What will be our witness? God is calling - how will we respond?

God is calling some of us to be a part of Orrell's church plant team. Will we hear, trust and obey?

God is calling us to expand our worship and education facilities here at Robina. As we look to the cost, God wants to perform a miracle of provision through us. Will we step into this adventure?

The future that unfolds before us is full of uncertainties. The road ahead is full of potholes, unexpected turns and even some dead ends along the way. There will be times when we will wonder whether the journey of faith is worth it.

But if God is for us, who can stand against us!

With God all things are possible!

As we step out in faith, our God will supply all our needs, according to his riches in glory.

Corrie Ten Boon said this:

Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.  
(Corrie ten Boom)