

Marching Forward by Faith!  
Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

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Have you heard the story about a man who slipped and fell while trying to clean the limbs from his roof? He slid down the steep shingles, slipped over the eave, and barely managed to grab hold of the gutters. Dangling there three stories from the earth, the man looked to the heavens above and shouted “My God can any body help me?” Suddenly time stopped, the clouds parted and a voice from heaven said, “Have faith, turn loose.” The man took one more glance at the ground below, then looked back to the heavens and said, “Is there anybody else up there who could help me?”

FAITH. You can't leave home without it. We live by faith not because we want to, but because we have to. We go to a doctor whose name we cannot pronounce, who writes us a prescription we cannot read, that we take to a pharmacist we do not know. He gives us a chemical compound we do not understand and tells us to take it in the sure and certain faith that it will make us better. If that is not faith, I don't know what it is. That is an act of faith.

When it comes to faith in God, some limp, some linger, while others leap. Here in Hebrews 11 we are introduced to the heroes of faith. These men and women, from the patriarch Abraham to the prostitute Rahab, proved faithful in the hour of need. They were people of faith. They knew how **to look up, let go and leap forward** in faith. Come let's take a closer look.

**TO HAVE FAITH IS TO LOOK UP.** I will never forget him as long as I live. He came to my home church in his bib overalls every Sunday and Wednesday. He hardly ever missed. Since he was too poor to own a car, it became my privilege as a 16 year old to drive him home after the service. Porter lived in a shack at the edge of town. He raised a number of children on welfare and odd jobs. He was not a particularly good father, but every week when I took him home, he gave me a saying I could keep. He'd praise God for the day, thank me for the ride and then say, “Keep looking up, keep looking up. Whatever you do, keep looking up.” Through the years I've never forgotten Porter's advice. Porter lived by faith.

In Hebrews 11:1-2 we read, “*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.*”

Psychologists say—look within. Opportunists say—look around. Optimists say—look ahead. Pessimists say—look out. Christianity says—LOOK UP. Look all the way up until you gaze into the eyes of the One who is looking for you. Fix your eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of your faith.

I know there are times when looking up, that we would prefer a second opinion, another person up there to talk to. Since we see in part and know in part, life appears to be a mixture at best.

I embrace this beautiful day saying, "This is the day the Lord has made" - and you remind me of tornadoes and floods. I stand before you a survivor of cancer and you remind me of those who didn't make it.

My grandson said the other day, "If you believe it, you can do it" - a kid after my own heart, but some of you have believed with all your heart and it didn't happen.

Loss of faith comes when we feel let down. Not just in the little things that really don't matter, but the big things like a dying child, a sick spouse, a divorce, a lost job, betrayal by a friend. In moments like these it's easy to despair, but what you do with what has happened makes all the difference.

Fanny Crosby was blind. Instead of sinking into self-pity she wrote the songs we love to sing. "I Am Thine O Lord," "To God be the Glory," "Blessed Assurance Jesus Is Mine, Oh what a foretaste of glory divine." In her later years surgeons found a cure for her blindness, but Fanny was too old for the surgery. "If you had only been born fifty years later," said a friend, "You would be able to see." Fanny responded, "Just think, the first face I will ever see will be the face of Jesus."

**TO HAVE FAITH IS TO LET GO.** In Verse 8 we read, "*By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.*"

I have often tried to imagine the conversation in the tent between Sarah and Abraham that night. "Just wanted you to know that we are moving." I can just hear her reply, "We are what?" "We're moving," replies Abraham. "Would you mind telling me where we are going?" "I don't know. We are just going."

Faith is an attitude toward life which issues in trusting acts of both will and intellect. It goes far beyond belief into active commitment. If belief seeks security, faith accepts risk. Faith is grounded in hope; faith is never final nor certain, but always asking and seeking and living and moving.

Life has taught us to hold on. God invites us to let go. We don't just want to enjoy the goodness of life. We want to own it, store it up, expand it, manipulate it for our own purposes. With clinched fists we cling to our possessions, opinions, theories, beliefs, attitudes, hurts, grievances, money, fearful that losing our grip will mean defeat. All along our salvation lies in letting go.

When I met Christ, it seemed as though life was rather like a bike ride, but it was a tandem bike—a bicycle built for two. I noticed that Jesus was in the back helping me pedal. I don't remember just when it was that He suggested we

change places, but life has not been the same since. When I was in control I knew the way. It might have been boring, but it was predictable—the shortest distance between two points.

When He took the lead, He showed me delightful long cuts, up mountains and through rocky places at break neck speeds. It was all I could do to hang on. Even though it looked like madness, He would say, “Pedal, Howard, just pedal.”

I was worried and I was anxious and I asked, “Where are you taking me?” He laughed and didn’t answer and I started to learn to trust. I forgot my boring life and entered into the adventure. When I would say, “I’m scared,” He would lean back and touch my hand. He took me to people with gifts I needed, gifts of healing, acceptance and joy. They gave me gifts to take on my journey, my Lord’s and mine.

And we were off again. He said, “Give the gifts away. They are extra baggage—too much weight.” So I gave them away to the people we met and I found in giving I received and still our burden was light. I didn’t trust Him at first to take control of my life. I thought He’d wreck it, but He knows bike secrets, knows how to make it bend to take sharp curves. He knows how to jump to clear high rocks; He knows how to fly through shorter, scary passages. And I am learning to shut up and pedal in the strangest places and I’m beginning to enjoy the view and the cool breeze on my face with my delightful constant companion, Jesus. When I’m sure I can’t do it anymore, He just smiles and says, “Pedal.”

**TO HAVE FAITH IS TO MAKE A LEAP.** Harrison Ford as Indiana Jones in the movie, The Last Crusade, is searching for the Holy Grail—the cup reported to have been used by Christ at the Last Supper. He comes at last to a cliff’s edge and a vast cavern beneath him. The Holy Grail is on the other side. Surveying the situation Indiana Jones says, “It really is a leap of faith.”

Yes, Jim, Joe, Janice, Joy—it really is a leap of faith. Are you willing to jump? Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard had it right; - to believe in God or even make the attempt to understand the nature of God is to make a leap of faith.

For years I’ve been telling the story about Desert Pete. A man was dying of thirst when he came upon a pump right out in the middle of the desert. There was a baking soda can tied to the handle with this note inside, “This pump was all right the last time I used it. I put a new sucker washer into it which ought to last a good long while, but the washer dries out and the pump has to be primed. Under the white rock I buried a bottle of water. It’s out of the sun and all corked up. There’s enough in it to prime the pump, but not if you drink some first. So pour about a quarter of the water in and let it soak to wet the leather. Then pour in the rest medium fast and pump like crazy. You’ll get water. Have faith. When you get all you want, fill her up for the next fella. Signed, Desert Pete. P.S. Don’t go drinking up the water first, you have to prime the pump.”

O, For a faith that will not shrink, though pressed by every foe  
That will not tremble on the brink of any earthly woe  
Lord give me such a faith as this, and then what're may come  
I'll taste, even now, the hallowed bliss, of an eternal home.

Richard Black said, "What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the Master calls a butterfly."

In Verse 13 we read, "*All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.*"

It is a leap of faith when you believe there's someone out there. It's a leap of faith when you believe that someone cares. The last year has taught me to live by faith. I don't know about tomorrow. The problem with life is that it has an "if" right in the middle of it, but I know who holds tomorrow and today I choose to live. I want every second, minute, hour; I want to live today.

Phillips Brooks came up with this acrostic from the word **F-A-I-T-H**. Faith stands for "**F**orsaking **A**ll, **I** Take **H**im."

Many things about tomorrow, I don't seem to understand, but "Forsaking all, I take Him."

Many things that happen today are more than I can comprehend, but "Forsaking all, I take Him."

Many things about yesterday continue to drag me down, but "Forsaking all, I take Him."

When living by faith I feel no alarm, "Forsaking all, I take Him."

**LOOK UP, LET GO, TAKE THE LEAP OF FAITH.**

Amen.













