

Hebrews 11 “Living By Faith”

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Date: 03 May 2026

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! Goodness. If you've not been at Southwood before, when the pastor cries before the sermon, it is not a good sign, and you should start praying for him right now.

Now, it's not just appropriate for our graduates, but for all of us who are needing to walk by faith, who are perhaps some of us wondering, what might it mean to have faith in the God of the Bible? I'm going to read just the first three verses for now, but we're going through the whole chapter, and I'd encourage you to keep a Bible open. To Hebrews 11, as we're going to look at a lot of it as we go, but right now, this is the holy, inerrant, infallible Word of God.

Now, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it, the people of old received their commendation.

[1 : 39] By faith, we understand that the universe was created by the Word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

God, thank you for your Word. Lord, would you help us this morning, as your people in this chapter through the Old Testament, as they heard your voice and trusted you and followed you, would you so help us, speak to us that we would hear you, work in our hearts, spirit, that we might love you, trust you, and in our lives, that we might follow you all of our days.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Seeing is believing is a philosophy that's familiar to many in our world these days.

Scientific naturalism tells you that what you see is all there is. That's all you can count on. But think about it more at a street level, the way we encounter it in our lives.

Even in a world where we are skeptical if the video on social media is actually real, for many of us, it is the things that we see.

[3 : 10] Our security comes from numbers we see in our bank account. Our happiness comes from the stuff we have that we can look at and enjoy.

Our beauty is often seen as skin deep. Our importance, our value in the world, whether we've been successful in life, is often seen in the size of our houses, the type of car that we drive, the location of our office, building our lives around the things we can see with our eyes, right?

Seems to come natural. Makes sense. Except that God's word tells us we are made to walk by faith, not by sight.

To build our lives quite differently, actually, around unseen realities. There's so much that we can't see.

I mean, our graduates, they're preparing to walk into new places, new people, new life experiences that are hard for them even to imagine today what's ahead.

[4 : 35] Our prayer guide's expectant mothers list indicates quite a few of you are investing lots of energy and excitement in preparing for a new person who will transform your life, and you don't even know what he or she is like yet.

Come to think of it, whether you're awaiting test results, navigating technological changes, trying to predict the weather, even things that we see leave us with lots of uncertainty.

All of us. Whom and what will we trust? Hebrews has just quoted at the end of chapter 10, last week, that famous line, the righteous shall live by faith.

That's how we're to live, by faith. And so chapter 11 starts by saying, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

In other words, what do those words mean? And what's it telling us about faith? It's the confidence of counting on something, of building my life around something, of placing my hope in something

that my eyes don't see right now.

[5 : 58] Why in the world would you do that? That sounds crazy, right? That's blind faith, isn't it? Well, not exactly.

You're not just insisting on believing something against all evidence to the contrary. No, he's actually about to give us story after story after story of people who lived like this, trusting God when they couldn't see.

And it's not an invitation here when he says live by faith to check your brain at the door and just come believe. That's not it. Rather, he actually begins the opposite direction.

He begins by saying, open your eyes. He turns our eyes, not only to the real stories, but also to the real world all around us. Do you see all this, he says?

Look out the windows. God made all this from nothing. All these things your eyes see, the closer you look, they have the marks of a designer, don't they?

[7 : 07] I mean, you're thinking, I didn't see mountains and bugs and flowers and stars formed. I didn't see them come into existence.

How'd that happen? There's a God behind it all. And people have been trusting him for millennia now, even though they haven't physically seen him.

In other words, it may just actually be that believing is seeing. That the clearest vision possible comes when you set your eyes on things you can't see.

What could that look like? That's so weird, pastor. What are you talking about? Can I live by faith? Would I want to? How would I do that? That's what this chapter's about.

Though our physical eyes are limited, the eyes of faith see. Above all else, they see a person.

[8 : 09] Here's what I mean. In the classic movie Aladdin, you've all, oh, I wish you'd all seen Aladdin. I'm going to show you just a little bit of it. Princess Jasmine, and she leaves the palace, okay, where she's grown up.

And she finds herself in a marketplace that she's never seen before. Completely unfamiliar place. But the boy who lives there on the streets, he knows the marketplace.

And they're being pursued, chased, and they're trapped now on the edge of a building. And she can't see, has no idea what's over the edge. She's left with a famous choice.

A leap of faith, one might say. But not a leap for no reason. She trusted the boy, right?

Later in the story, that's actually how she recognizes this boy when he's dressed up as a prince. Do you trust me? Do you trust me? He's offering to show her the world on a magic carpet, and look what happens.

[9 : 33] Do you trust me? I showed you that second clip because I think God wants us to recognize him saying again to us, do you trust me?

Do you trust me? There's so much you don't know. There's so much out there you haven't seen, and you can't see, and you won't understand.

But do you trust me? That's what it comes down to. It's interesting as we go through this chapter how much he talks about seeing.

Notice by faith, verse 26, Moses left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, even though the king was right there in front of him, and very powerful.

Moses boldly stood before him, called the king to account. How did he do that? How did he stand in front of him? For he endured as seeing him who is invisible.

[10 : 52] It's a great statement of faith if you want one to take home with you today. The eyes of faith see God's person. Believe that he exists, verse 6 says, that you can actually draw near to him because he's personal.

He wants you to know him. So how do you see an invisible God? Believe then that he exists.

Well, verse 3, remember, told us that God's creation is a big part of that. We can see that someone started all this. Someone incredibly powerful and creative and orderly and preexistent.

Someone did this. We know that Moses had heard God speak by this point in his story. We hear him speak to us, don't we?

In his word. It tells us who this creator God is. It explains so much about his world and about our place in it. And over time, people have learned that his words are trustworthy.

[12 : 02] And true. For example, verse 11, by faith, Sarah. What happens to her? She conceives a child when to her human eyes, physically, she's too old.

But she sees God. She considers him faithful who had promised. She hadn't physically seen God, right?

But Sarah had watched for decades as God led her and her husband Abraham, as God rescued her in various situations, as God helped Abraham grow.

So she saw God and learned that she could trust him. He comes through. Person after person here acts on things they haven't seen because they trust God himself.

Do you slow down to see the invisible God? If you don't, it'll just be everything that comes in front of your face. That is the very beginning of the life of faith, y'all.

[13:09] Seeing the invisible God. If he's real, and he is, if he made this world, and he did, then you will not be left without reminders of him no matter where you live this fall.

No matter how confusing the path forward appears to you, you won't be left without things that will point you to see him. You don't have to see the future. You see the God of the present and the future.

And you look by faith for him. And you trust him. That's living by faith. Secondly, we learn the eyes of faith see God's promises.

Even seeing ahead to their fulfillment. This is so remarkable to me. I hope I can give you a picture of it.

It made me pray this week. God, help my faith. See, one after another in this chapter, they hold on to God's promises to them, even though for the large majority of them, they don't actually get those promises fulfilled in their lifetimes.

[14:25] Their entire lives. Look at Sarah again, who believed God was faithful. And so she and her husband Abraham become the parents of descendants as many as the stars and the sand.

Amazing. But did they live long enough to see that happen? No. Verse 13. These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar.

That's repeated again after all the people who suffered terribly and were commended for their faith, but verse 39 says, did not receive what was promised yet.

But what did all these see? What kept them going? They saw the things God promised to the point that they greeted them from afar.

They were that real. What faith they had. They so trusted this God, believed that He'd proven Himself faithful, found being His so wonderfully worthy that they could die without receiving the fulfillment of His promise.

[15:45] Do you believe that? Look at Moses' story. It's so powerful. Verse 24. By faith, Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. Moses had at his disposal the power, the prestige, the influence, the wealth of the world in the nation of Egypt, right?

Thanks to God sending Joseph there to prepare Egypt for the seven years of famine. Every nation around is coming to Egypt. Egypt. And Moses lives in the palace.

But God's people were enslaved. And Moses chooses which one? To be with them. Mistreated with God's people.

Think about it, y'all. Mistreated with these slaves or pleasant and comfortable and rich in sin.

[17:13] How did Moses decide? It wasn't just that he was so holy. Moses did the math. It says. If God is real, then being on his team, even if it hurts for days or months or years, even if I never make it to the promised land before I die and he didn't, it's actually way more valuable in the long run than all the gold in Egypt which will only make me feel good for a little while.

I've got God himself, Moses said. I've got eternal treasure. Life is not all about what I see right in front of me because God has promised to deliver his people.

I can trust him. Y'all, that's hard. The fleeting pleasures of sin look exactly like that.

They feel, they sound, they taste pleasurable. That's what it says. And so, if you're going to choose something different, you have to believe that God's ways, God's laws are sweeter than honey.

Seeing God as the ultimate king, seeing his words as trustworthy, seeing his promises as true and things that are actually able to be held on to, that's what enables you, for example, to say no to sex before marriage.

[18 : 51] Even when it's increasingly popular and your head tells you it makes sense. It's what enables you to say no to using AI to cheat on the project when everyone else is doing it and your grade will probably be lower than theirs if you don't.

It's what enables you to say yes to a Sabbath day when it feels like you're falling behind because God says it's how you work best. It's a gift, I promise.

He says just trust me. Maybe you're getting ready to move to a new place and you're worried you're going to be alone. You'll struggle to fit in, find community.

By faith you can see God's promise that Bill mentioned earlier, never to leave you nor forsake you. Even when you feel alone, you can say I'll go.

Maybe you're deeply sad about being childless. Sometimes it makes you feel God has abandoned you. He's not given you the longings of your heart.

[20 : 09] By faith you can see God's promise of brothers and sisters and sons and daughters in his family, even if they don't come for a while in your lifetime even.

See, faith is not a magic wand to make your life better in the way and time you please. No, it is a confident trust in the God who will make your life best in the way and time he pleases.

That's faith. Whether you see it today or not, trust him. God is keeping his promise to you. He is. It's who he is. He's faithful.

You can count on it. It's actually what Moses is counting on. When it says verse 26, he was looking to the reward.

That means something beyond this life, doesn't it? If only for this life, we have hope in Christ. Y'all, just listen to what God's people endure starting at verse 32.

[21 : 23] It sounds good at first. What more shall I say for time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms and forced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release so that they might rise again to a better life.

Others suffered mocking and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned. They were sawn in two. They were killed with the sword.

They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated, of whom the world was not worthy, wandering about in deserts and mountains and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised. They didn't receive yet what was promised.

[22 : 44] After all those things, key line, verse 38, of whom the world was not worthy.

It means that there was no way that the world could satisfy them. they suffered deeply here. He's honest about that.

They were made for something beyond this life. Their faith saw something else, even if they never got to have it here. It saw God's place.

It's a theme throughout this chapter. Just as God said to Noah, verse 7, build an ark when you've never seen a flood. Boy, that's weird.

God also said to Abraham, who was comfortable and successful, he was very prosperous at home in his own land, verse 8, go out to the promised land I'm going to give you.

[23 : 46] And Abraham said, where? Never seen it. Can't look it up online to see if I'll like it. And then much of the rest of Abraham's life was spent journeying living.

Living where? Intense. Why? What was his reward? Was it the dirt of Canaan that he would finally get there?

No. Verse 10, he was looking forward to the city with foundations designed and built by God.

Back to verse 13. they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they're seeking a homeland.

If they'd been thinking of that land from which they'd gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country that is a heavenly one.

[24 : 50] Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared for them a city. Listen, God's got a place for you, a country, a city, and it's not even Auburn or Tuscaloosa.

Of all of his promises that you can count on for you, don't miss this one. He's made a place for you forever with him so that even if you live in a tent now, you will reign with him forever.

So that even if you don't make any money in this life, you will walk on streets of gold forever. So that even if you cry and suffer and die before you get to enjoy the best years of your life, you will live and laugh and love forever.

The best is always yet to come. See, this world is not worthy of you, but the next one will be. It will delight and satisfy you forever in a way that you've only tasted a sample of what it's going to feel like to be full on the glories of God forever.

That's your reward, a city prepared for you by the one who's not ashamed to be your God. He's actually eager to be seen there with you every day.

[26 : 37] Can you not wait for that? You are there with God and he's delighting in you. What a reward he is. I can trust him for that no matter what else.

I heard stories this week of Iranian Christians who could be in Hebrews 11 as far as I'm concerned. Especially in the last few weeks, you want to talk about not seeing what's ahead?

If they avoid the bombs around them, increasingly they might get arrested, beaten, even killed, for their faith.

It's one of several countries these days where Christians really every day have to ask, is Jesus worth it? And you know what's happening in Iran?

The church is growing like crazy. See, faith sees God and the place that he has prepared for those who love him even if this one seems to be going away fast.

[27 : 53] Maybe most of you don't live in Iran. I also sat with our brother Jim Harris this week. He so encouraged my heart as he described his struggle with cancer.

He said he's been fighting the cancer because it's bad, it hurts, but Jim's not desperately fighting for his life.

No. His life cancer can't take away. His life is hidden with Christ in God, his Savior who's gone to prepare a place for him, even if he doesn't know when he gets to be there.

He doesn't see what tomorrow holds. He doesn't know his days, but he sees God and his promise and his hope forever. He has a place.

Graduates, is Jesus worth it? You're going to have to answer that question many times in the days ahead, some small moments, some big moments.

[29 : 07] all of us have to answer that question. Maybe this is a reminder that none of us sees what tomorrow holds for us here.

All of us, as a result, face uncertain futures, new relationships, new seasons of life that we don't know how to handle. Will we walk by faith today or tomorrow because Jesus is worth it?

Will we just default to what we see? It's what we know. It's what we're safe and comfortable with. It's what we think we can control. Is that what we'll lean back into?

God's telling you today, if you want a firm foundation, it's him, his promises, his place. grace. See, if you don't know this yet, every single one of us will face a day when our next step, our eternity beyond this life is unseen.

And that next step is based not on what college we attended, doesn't help. Not even your ACT score helps. Unbelievable. It's not based on the amount of money that you've made.

[30 : 31] It's not based on the family you've started, the beaches you've visited, the professional awards you've received. They don't count. In fact, none of them will catch you when you're falling over the edge on that day.

None of them. You don't get points for any of those things that you can see. That would be living by sight, living by faith, says what matters on that day is did you trust God?

Did you put your hope in His promises? Did you rest in His place? Can He come through? It's the better way, friend. It is.

God. I hope you're still just a little bit unsettled at all these people who sacrificed for God and then died without getting what they were promised.

Like, what kind of advertisement is that? God, come on. He finally tells us why in the last verse of the chapter. Since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us, they should not be made perfect.

[31 : 52] This is the last thing. Something better. Southwood, please don't get this question wrong. I will cry all day.

in Hebrews, who or what is something better? Thank you. Jesus.

When you read something better in Hebrews, it's talking about Jesus. Jesus coming. He is the better access, the better relationship with God, the better sacrifice, the better priest.

Here, the better city, the better country. All of that, listen, living by faith is not as complicated as I may have made it sound this morning.

It really is as simple as seeing Jesus. It boils down to that. Yes, we can see the person of God in creation and in his word, but we especially and most brilliantly see the glory of God made flesh in the face of Jesus Christ.

[33 : 02] and we know he exists and we know that because he's come, he wants us to know him personally. The promises of God through the shadows of the Old Testament, what's he promising?

Forgiveness and cleansing, deliverance from bondage into relationship, a land for security. All of those promises are yes and amen in Jesus through his life and his death and his resurrection life. And your confidence in God's place, though you have never seen it, is in Jesus as well. Because he brings us to the city where he has already gone to prepare a place for us where he is the lamp and the light of that city forever.

Forever. her. Please hear me. Dear graduates, dear friends, seeing Jesus and trusting him is not a blind leap of faith.

This is really important. When Jesus says, do you trust me? He's not asking you to leave your comfortable, secure place and go somewhere you've never seen with your own eyes unless he's done it himself.

[34 : 28] It's exactly what Jesus does for you, isn't it? He leaves the glories of heaven. He suffers beyond what any of us have known.

He dies on a cross and he lives today saying, trust me, you don't have to do what I've done, but I know what's over the edge. I know what's coming next.

I've been there. So you just see me and take my hand and walk by faith. That's what we're offered this morning. He may be calling you to leave home and walk by faith for the very first time today.

I can't promise you it will be easy. I can promise you it probably won't. But I can promise you you'll never be alone and eternity will be glorious with your best days always ahead of you.

If you're going off to college unsure of that, I'd love to talk to you today. Don't leave today without talking to me or your parents or someone you trust about that.

[35 : 36] God's but he may be calling you to leave home and walk by faith again today because it's a new season and you may be afraid.

You may be sad. You may be overwhelmed by all the things that you see with your eyes. and he says fix your eyes not on what is seen.

It's temporary. I promise. But on what's unseen. It's eternal. Never ending. So faith is the assurance of things hoped for.

The certainty of things not seen. Like the fact. The fact that along with Abraham and Sarah and Moses and all the saints of old you who suffer now will be made perfect forever.

You haven't seen that. It's hard to imagine but it's true and it is certain because God has something better for you.

[36 : 50] Even Jesus. Let's pray. God thank you for giving us Jesus.

Thank you that he's better. Even suffering with him is worth more than all the treasures of the world and these saints of old who walked with you and never tasted it here.

Oh they rejoiced when they saw Jesus' day and so they celebrate today and forever with him. they're not complaining that they never got the promises here.

They are praising you that they're living in your promises now and forever. Thank you Jesus. Would you teach us to walk by faith?

It's not natural for us. We trust so many other things especially the ones we can see. so help us graduates and parents and all your people to trust you and walk with you today.

[38 : 06] We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. For more information visit us online at [southwood.org](https://yetanother sermon.host).