

SEVEN FRUITS OF FAITH: A Sermon on Hebrews 11:23–31

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Serving as one of your pastors is a great privilege and joy. I love singing with you, praying with you, and teaching you. I cherish getting to see you serve one another and to watch you delight in building relationships together. Week by week I get budget updates and by this learn that you continue to give to this work. I praise our God for every life represented in this room. I look forward to growing with you and to seeing our faith produce more and more fruit. Turn with me today to Hebrews 11:23–31, and as you do, pray with me.... Follow along as I read....

Eighteen times in this chapter we read examples of fruit that comes forth “by faith.” *Faith* here is a proper disposition or orientation of the heart toward God’s promises. Faith is future-oriented for in it we trust God to fulfill promises not yet realized. As it states in 11:1, faith is believing things hoped for, things yet unseen. Or again in 11:13, “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar.”

Throughout this chapter, faith in God leads people to pursue certain patterns of life. “By faith Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain” (11:4); “by faith Noah ... constructed an ark for the saving of his household” (11:7), “by faith Abraham obeyed,” going to the land of promise (11:8). What we hope for or dread tomorrow changes who we are today. Faith is the root, obedience the fruit (Gal 5:6; Eph 6:23; 1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 1:11; Jas 2:18, 20, 22).

The main idea for this morning’s message is this: *faith bears fruit*. This passage displays seven fruits of faith in God’s promises. By faith God’s people (1) value and preserve human life, (2) refuse certain positions and pleasures and accept persecution, (3) forsake evil, (4) admit our need for forgiveness, (5) keep following God, (6) heed his Word, and (7) experience life. *Faith bears fruit*.

1. By Faith We Value and Preserve Human Life (v. 23)

In 11:23, the author continues his journey through Old Testament history by highlighting moments of faith related to the life of Moses, beginning with the faith of his parents. “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict” (v. 23). You’ll recall how after the patriarch Jacob and his family settled in Egypt, “the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them” (Exod 1:7). A new king arose over Egypt who didn’t know Joseph, and he sought

to contain Israel first by oppression through forced labor and then by demanding the Hebrew midwives kill all male babies. But when neither decree was effective at halting Israel's growth, Pharaoh commanded the Egyptians to cast "every son that is born to the Hebrews ... into the Nile" (Exod 1:22). Like the murdering serpent in the garden who sought to kill God's son, Pharaoh sought to destroy a potential future army of Israelites who could stand against him.

We then immediately read about an offspring of a woman, recalls the promised male deliverer who would crush the serpent's head (Gen 3:15). "Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months" (Exod 2:1–2). To say the child was "fine" or "beautiful" could simply point to the fact that, in an age of high infant death, Moses was healthy and flourishing. But I think it likely points to more.

Stephen, reflecting on this same passage in Acts 7:20, says that the baby Moses "was beautiful *to God*," helping us recognize that the parents sought to preserve his life not because he was cute or in good physical condition but because they knew God valued him and had shaped him with purpose.¹ Therefore, following in the paths of the midwives who "feared God" and stood against Pharaoh's command to kill the Hebrew boys (Exod 1:17, 21), Moses's parents hid him from the Egyptians, not fearing the serpent-king's edict. They knew if the Egyptians learned of their civil disobedience, they and their boy would be killed. Yet they valued Moses's life as one made in God's image, and they treasured by faith God's pledge of a coming serpent crusher. *Faith leads us to value and preserve human life* for God's saving purposes regardless of the cost (Heb 11:23).

I think of Corrie ten Boom (1892–1983) whose Christian father by faith led his family during World War II to hide Jews in their home from the Nazis. In time the family was found out, and both Corrie and her sister were sent to various concentration camps, the last being Ravensbrück, a woman's labor camp in Germany. Corrie's sister died in the camp, but then a clerical error allowed Corrie to be released just one week before all the women in her age group were sent to the gas chambers. The sisters' teaching and relentless love had led many of these women to Jesus. By faith they rescued Jews; by faith they went to prison; by faith many of their fellow inmates were saved. *Faith leads us to value and preserve human life* for God's saving purposes regardless of the cost (v. 23).

¹ On Moses's household being grounded in generational faith, see Gen 15:6 and Exod 6:2.

2. By Faith We Refuse Certain Positions and Pleasures and Accept Persecution (vv. 24–26)

The Nile was to be the place of death for Israel's sons, but God used Moses's own little "ark" to save him from the judgment waters that brought him to be adopted and raised as son of Pharaoh's daughter (Exod 2:10). At this time, Egypt was the elite empire of the ancient world, which means that Moses as grandson of Pharaoh would have been trained in the highest schools, becoming equipped in languages, literature, science, history, politics, international diplomacy, war, and economics—all features that equipped him to lead a nation. As Stephen later says, "Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds" (Acts 7:22).

Into this context, Exod 2:11 notes, "When Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people." Moses authored Exodus, and twice here he says that the Hebrews and not the Egyptians were *his people*. Having witnessed an Egyptian battering a fellow Israelite, Moses "struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand" (2:12). Then the next day he again went to his people and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the man in the wrong why he was being so mean, and he responded, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" (Exod 2:12–14). Stephen tells us that Moses "supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not" (Acts 7:25).

Even as an adult with all the prestige and power of the king's house, Moses remembered his roots and rejected Egypt. He would have recalled the faith-filled stories his parents had told him of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah. He knew Abraham's offspring nation would inherit the land, and he believed the promises that Abraham's individual offspring would one day inherit the gate of his enemies and bless the world (Gen 12:1–3; 17:4–8; 22:17–18; 26:3–4). So, Hebrews 11:24–25 declares: "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."

Moses's position in Egypt's royal house granted him ease, safety, security, power, and pleasures unenjoyed by his oppressed Hebrew brothers. But he recognized that identifying with Egypt would have been apostasy, for he would have been embracing self-rule and self-reliance and rejecting God's word, ways, purposes, and people. So, Moses chose "to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin." Sin is pleasurable, but only for a time (cf. 1 John 2:16–17). The selfishness of sin in time isolates us from others. The

guilt of sin stains us with shame. And repentance and forgiveness in Jesus are the only way to find cleansing and freedom, hope and healing. We must be born again.

What drove Moses, by faith, to turn from Egypt to embrace God's people? Verse 26 says that "he considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward." This is the only time that *Christ* explicitly appears in this chapter, which is striking in view of its focus on faith. In John's Gospel Jesus stressed that the Scriptures "bear witness" about him and that "Moses ... wrote" of him (John 5:39, 46). Hence, Moses hoped in Jesus's coming and was among the "many prophets and righteous people [who] longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it" (Matt 13:17). So, the phrase "the reproach of Christ" could mean the reproach Moses willingly took on for Christ's sake (Luke 14:33; 1 Pet 4:14) and for Christ's glory (Phil 3:7–8). But I think there is more going on here.

Specifically, I think "the reproach of Christ" means reproach *like Christ* would endure from the hands of those who stood against God and his saving purposes for the world (cf. Ps 69:9; Rom 15:3). The disgrace and disapproval Moses took on in identifying with Israel foreshadowed the suffering Christ himself would endure on behalf of the many, and Moses consciously and intentionally stepped into this pain for the cause of God's plan of salvation that would climax in the cross of Christ. Using the same term for "reproach," Hebrews 13:12–13 says that, because "Jesus ... suffered ... to sanctify the people through his own blood ... let us go to him ... and bear the *reproach* he endured" (cf. 12:1–3). Moses knew Jesus would suffer to save many, and Moses identified with him and with Israel for the same cause. In Paul's language, Moses recognized that in choosing to be persecuted by Egypt, he would be "carrying in [his] body the death of Jesus" (2 Cor 4:10; cf. Col 1:24) and thus displaying the type of abuse Jesus himself would endure to save a people for God.

And why did Moses do this? "He was looking to the reward" (Heb 11:26). Verse 6 told us that the faith that pleases God believes "that he rewards those who seek him." God's promises clarify our reward, and they motivate the life of faith. What we hope for tomorrow changes who we are today. Moses believed that aligning with God's people would bring something better than fleeting pleasure, and this conviction motivated him even to suffer for Christ's sake. As Paul said, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom 8:18). This is the power of God's promises. So, I summarize: *faith leads us to refuse certain positions and pleasures and accept persecution* to identify with God and his people (Heb 11:24–26).

3. By Faith We Fearlessly Forsake Evil (v. 27)

Look at verse 27: “By faith [Moses] left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for endured as seeing him who is invisible.” Once Moses found out that others were aware that he had killed the Egyptian, Exodus 2:14 says, “Then Moses was afraid, and thought, ‘Surely the thing is known.’” Yet while he was initially afraid, his faith established his resolve, and he forsook Egypt without fear of the king’s wrath. The text then says that he “endured” or held fast, as if “seeing him who is invisible.” Foundational to faith is believing that the invisible God actually exists (v. 6; cf. Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17)—the Creator of the world (Heb 1:1), the one in Majesty over all (1:3; 8:1), and the designer and builder of our future, heavenly city (11:10). And if this powerful being is with us and will never leave or forsake us (13:5), we can endure unafraid. *Faith leads us fearlessly to forsake evil while holding fast to the invisible God (v. 27).*

4. By Faith We Admit Our Need for Forgiveness (v. 28)

Moses’s flight from Egypt led him to the wilderness for forty years where God equipped him as a shepherd. But then God led him back to demand that Pharaoh let God’s people go. Ten plagues followed, the last of which was the killing of every firstborn in the land. To be protected from the Destroyer, God instructs Israel to kill the Passover lamb and to mark their doorposts with its blood (Exod 12:21–30). That night, Yahweh struck down all the firstborn of Egypt, but he passed over the houses marked by the blood, sparing Israel. We’re told the cries through the land were great “for there was not a house where someone was not dead” (Exod 12:30).

Our God is perfectly just and worthy of all our trust, obedience, and lives. When we fail to give him what he deserves, his justice requires that we be punished. He must make things right, and doing so demands that he shed the blood of either the sinner or a substitute (Rom 6:23). The blood of the lambs placed on the doorframes in faith protected Israel from the Destroyer. The lamb’s death stood in the place of the death of the firstborns and pointed ahead to the one of whom John the Baptizer would say, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Paul was equally explicit, declaring that “Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor 5:7). In Hebrews 11:28, we read that, to secure forgiveness of sins, Moses led Israel in trusting God’s provision of a substitute. “By faith, he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.” *Faith leads us to admit our need for forgiveness by means of a substitute (v. 28).*

5. By Faith We Keep Following God (v. 29)

After the deaths of the firstborn in Egypt, Pharaoh finally relented—at least temporarily—and freed Israel to go to the wilderness to worship Yahweh. Yet the king soon changed his mind and pursued the Hebrews, who were led by God’s glory cloud to the Red Sea. Faith bears fruit, and with water before and the Egyptians behind, Moses urged Israel, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent” (Exod 14:13–14). With this context, we now read Hebrews 11:29: “By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned.” Exodus 14:31 declares, “Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they *believed* in the LORD and in his servant Moses.”

Biblical *faith leads us to keep following God* even when life appears hopeless (v. 29). When the bills are due and the bank account is low, we believe the promise, “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:19; cf. Matt 6:33). When we fear the repercussions of standing true, we by faith choose not to “fear those who kill the body” but to “fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell,” all the while reminding ourselves: “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.... Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matt 10:28–31). When we are tempted to lust, we say No to sin and Yes to purity, believing “blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt 5:8). When we are overcome by the guilt of sin, those in Christ Jesus trust that “there is ... now no condemnation” for “Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us” (Rom 8:1, 34). And when we battle the fear of failure and not enduring, we believe the promise that “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). Biblical *faith leads us to keep following God* even when life appears hopeless (v. 29).

Yet this faith must endure. We must keep trusting, keep believing, keep hoping. Since the mention of Moses’s birth, the author of Hebrews has simply walked through the story. But now he will skip the final forty years of Moses’s life as recorded in Exodus 16–Deuteronomy 34. Why? Because the exodus generation did not continue to believe and because of this died in the wilderness. Thus, back in chapter 3 the author of Hebrews charged:

“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.” For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt

led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. (3:15–19)

Both the exodus generation and Moses himself died in the wilderness due to their lack of faith. Do not take lightly the silence in Hebrews 11 regarding Israel's time in the wilderness; instead, take it as a warning. As the author already said back in chapter 3, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.... For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end" (Heb 3:12, 14). Do not stop believing like Israel did but instead walk by faith. *Faith leads us to keep following God* even when life appears hopeless (11:29).

6. By Faith We Heed God's Word (v. 30)

Following Moses's death, God takes Israel into the promised land under Joshua's leadership. God declares to him, "No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life.... I will not leave you or forsake you" (Josh 1:5). Israel's first conflict arose against the city of Jericho just north of the Dead Sea. God commanded Israel to march around the city once per day for six days with the priests blowing trumpets before the ark-throne of God. On the seventh day, they were to circle it seven times as the priests sounded their trumpets (John 6:2–4). And this is what Israel did. We then read that on "the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, 'Shout, for the LORD has given you the city.' ... As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they captured the city" (Josh 6:16, 20). God's word may not always make sense, but it's always right. As we trust his promises and heed his Word, even miracles can happen. James tells us that Elijah, with a nature like ours, prayed for God to withhold rain, and for 3.5 years the skies were like iron. Then he prayed again, and the rains came and the earth bore fruit (Jas 5:17–18). Therefore, James urges elders to pray over the sick, and promises, "the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up" (Jas 5:15). "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days" (Heb 11:30). *Faith leads us to heed God's Word* even if it seems strange, knowing God can work miracles (v. 30).

7. By Faith We Experience Life (v. 31)

After Israel captured the city of unbelieving, unrepentant rebels, everyone was killed except one woman and her family. Earlier, before Israel had even

crossed into the promised land, Joshua had sent two spies to scope it out. They found haven in Jericho in the home of a prostitute named Rahab. When questioned by the city administration, she deceived them by claiming the men had already left the town and should be searched for. Having protected the men, she then declared her faith in Yahweh (Josh 2:9–14). Rather than rebelling against the Lord's authority like the rest of Jericho, she sought refuge in his glorious power, trusting that those aligned with him would live.

And so, while the walls fell and Jericho was destroyed, the text says, "Rahab the prostitute and her father's household and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive. And she has lived in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho" (Josh 6:25). Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute, is the only woman other than the matriarch Sarah who is named in Hebrews 11 (but see v. 35). While she was a Canaanite, she was treated like an Israelite because, as it says in verse 31, she "by faith ... did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies."

Faith leads us to experience life after turning from sin and aligning with God's cause (v. 31). Regardless of your past, this day you can put your hope in God and find the life that Rahab enjoyed. Rahab was the mother of Boaz, great grandmother of King David, and one of the great women of faith through whom God brought the Messiah (see Matt 1:5). A Canaanite prostitute believed and now lives, and the call of this text is to ensure that you will see her and not fail to keep believing and keep following like the exodus generation in the wilderness.

Believing God's promises bears fruit in our lives (2 Pet 1:4; cf. 2 Cor 7:1). His promises motivate our actions, and what we hope for or dread tomorrow changes who we are today. Faith bears fruit.

1. By Faith We *Value and Preserve Human Life* Regardless of the Cost (v. 23).
2. By Faith We *Refuse Certain Positions and Pleasures* to Identify with God and His People (vv. 24–26).
3. By Faith We *Fearlessly Forsake Evil* While Holding Fast to God (v. 27).
4. By Faith We *Admit Our Need for Forgiveness* by Means of a Substitute (v. 28).
5. By Faith We *Follow God* Even When Life Appears Hopeless (v. 29).
6. By Faith We *Heed God's Word* Even If It Seems Strange, Knowing God Can Work Miracles (v. 30).
7. By Faith We *Experience Life* after Turning from Sin and Aligning with God's Cause (v. 31).

Believe God's promises today, remembering always that true faith bears fruit.

Lord's Supper

As the music team comes forward and we transition to communion, I wonder if there are any of these fruits of faith for which your heart longs to see more evident in your life: (1) valuing and preserving human life; (2) refusing certain positions or pleasures; (3) fearlessly forsaking evil; (4) admitting your need for forgiveness; (5) following God; (6) heeding his Word; (7) experiencing life. Today, if you hear his voice, believe that he will never leave you or forsake you. Believe that perseverance will result in great reward. Believe that lasting life can be enjoyed by all who hope in him.

This bread and this cup represent true hope for life and a future if you put your trust in Jesus. All who have confessed with their mouths that Jesus is Lord and believed in their hearts that God raised him from the dead and who have been baptized are welcome to enjoy this table. Hold the element until the song is concluded, and then we will partake together. Pray *by faith* today, asking God to let that faith bear fruit. As the music team goes through the first song, feel free to let your lips remain silent and to let your heart reach out to God in faith. Jesus died and Jesus rose that we might hope for growth and lasting life by faith.