

Script: Pastor Frank Johnson

What More Can God Say? (On Hebrews)
“FAITH: The Courage of Genuine Faith, I”
Hebrews 11:7-12

Take a first look.

I. HOW FULLY DO WE REALLY TRUST GOD? How many of you know who Robert Chesebrough is? “Robert Chesebrough believed in his product. He’s the fellow who invented Vaseline, a petroleum jelly refined from rod wax, the ooze that forms on shafts of oil rigs. He so believed in the healing properties of his product that he became his own guinea pig. He burned himself with acid and flame; he cut and scratched himself so often and so deeply that he bore the scars of his tests the rest of his life. But he proved his product worked. People had only to look at his wounds, now healed, to see the value of his work—and the extent of his belief.”²

II. ARE WE WILLING TO PUT OUR FAITH TO SUCH TESTS? Do we really believe what God has revealed through Jesus Christ? Faith is a way of *seeing*, a way of *acting*, and a way of *making decisions* about the future.

III. THE WRITER TO THE HEBREWS SEES IN THE STORIES OF NOAH AND OF ABRAHAM THE COURAGE OF GENUINE FAITH. Faith has the courage to step out into the unknown, to see what others can’t see, to trust God, even though there is no assurance as to what that trust might demand.

Translation: Hebrews 11:7-12

⁷ By faith Noah, after being warned about the things that were not yet being seen, being moved with reverence, constructed an ark for the salvation of his family, through which³ he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness according to faith.

⁸ By faith after being called, Abraham obeyed to go to a place which he was about to receive as an inheritance, and he went not understanding where he is going. ⁹ By faith he migrated to the land of the promise as not his own, dwelling in a tent with Isaac and Jacob, the fellow-heirs of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he was awaiting the city having foundations whose Designer and Builder is God. ¹¹ By faith Sarah, herself infertile and beyond the season of age, received the ability to establish a posterity, since she considered the One Who had promised to be faithful. ¹² Therefore also from one they were begotten, and these as good as dead, just as the stars in the heavens in number and as the sand along the edge of the sea, innumerable.

Take a closer look at Hebrews 11:7-12.

I. GENUINE FAITH HAS THE COURAGE TO FOLLOW GOD INTO THE UNKNOWN. v. 7

1. Noah was “warned about things not yet seen.” What were those things that were not yet seen? First, Noah had never seen it *rain*. Second, he had never seen *God destroy the whole world* that He had created, either. God promised both: it would rain for forty days and nights, and the whole world, except those who entered the ark, would be destroyed.

2. *He built the ark with these goals and results:*

¹ Message #19 in the series.

² Ralph Walker, Concord, North Carolina. *Leadership*, Vol. 12, no. 1.

³ Faith, that is.

a. What was his motivation? The phrase “in holy fear” captures it. His motivation for building the ark was his confident trust in the living God and his belief that God had truly spoken to him. He was not afraid of God in the sense of dreading personal harm, but he held God in highest reverence as both the Creator and Judge of the earth.

b. What was his purpose? “To save his family.” The ark was an instrument of salvation, a fitting type for Jesus Christ in the New Covenant (see Matthew 24; Luke 17; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5).

c. The results were twofold: (1) “He condemned the world.” Those who didn’t believe God’s word through Noah perished in the deluge. Noah himself was the agent of that condemnation, not the Source. God gave them 120 years in which to change their ways, but they would not. (2) He “became heir of the righteousness that comes from faith.” Noah has set an example for all subsequent human history. He has shown us how to put our faith in God and receive His righteousness. He has shown us what “the obedience of faith” looks like and what it means to be in a right relationship with God as a result.

A—What might God want to accomplish in our lives that He has never done before? Will we be ready to trust Him for it?

I—There was a time in my Christian walk that I was offered an opportunity to teach Sunday School. I had never done it before. I was petrified. I worked hard at learning the meaning of the texts of Scripture I was charged to teach to a group of youth—some with serious hardships in their families and in their personal lives. I grew from that experience. The time came at which I was offered the opportunity to present a message to the whole church. I was again petrified. I worked hard at scripting my message so that I would speak the truth from Scripture. On that first occasion, the pastor’s wife came up to me after the service and said, “I enjoyed listening to you this morning. Your voice reminds me of a man I listen to on the radio every evening. He puts me right to sleep.” Then, she quickly added, “No, I didn’t mean it like that!” Uh-huh. In time, I was offered the opportunity to pastor a church. I was mortified even more! I still am mortified! How can I, sinner as I am, stand before the people of God week after week, opening the truth of God from His holy Book? How can I give leadership to the church’s ministries? How can I express the care of Christ to people in times of need and crisis? *By faith!*

I have come to realize what Juan Carlos Ortiz learned in a visit with a circus trapeze artist. The performer admitted that the net underneath them kept them from breaking their necks, but he also added this insight. “The net also keeps us from falling. Imagine there is no net. We would be so nervous that we would be more likely to miss and fall. If there wasn’t a net, we would not dare to do some of the things we do. But because there’s a net, we dare to make two turns, and once I made three turns—thanks to the net!”

And Ortiz made the application: “We have security in God. When we are sure in his arms, we dare to attempt big things for God. We dare to be holy. We dare to be obedient. We dare, because we know the eternal arms of God will hold us if we fall.”⁴

Amen, Brother Juan! Amen.

II. GENUINE FAITH HAS THE COURAGE TO SEE THE PERMANENT BEYOND THE TEMPORARY. Vv. 8-10

Our focus shifts now ahead in time to the story of Abraham. His story begins in Genesis 12 and is told at length.

⁴ from *Leadership Journal*.

1. *Abraham left his homeland to go to an unknown country, because of the promise of God.* The key words in verse 8 are “obeyed and went, *even though he didn’t know where he was going.*” He did not know the destination, but He knew the Guide. That gave him the courage to pack up his possessions, to step out, and to make the journey.

2. *He lived in tents while there, as did Isaac and Jacob after him, because they were looking ultimately toward the “city ... of God.”* There is an interpretation here of the story of Abraham’s exodus. “He was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”

A—Faith has the courage to look beyond the familiar, beyond the commonplace and the known, to see what God wants to bring to pass that will last forever.

I—It is first of all a matter of perspective. Remember those three friends who visited the Grand Canyon? One of them was an artist. She said, “What a beautiful scene to paint!” One of them was a pastor. His comment was, “What a wonderful testimony of the handiwork of God!” The third was a cowboy. He said, “What a terrible place to lose a cow!”

It’s all a matter of your frame of reference, is it not it? I am afraid I am often more like the cowboy than the pastor or artist. I can identify with the character of Puddleglum⁵ in the Chronicles of Narnia. He was something of a “we’re-all-gonna-die-every-one-of-us!” type. But he was also able to keep doing the right thing, because it was simply the right thing, too. He plodded on to fulfill the quest on which Aslan the Great Lion set them on, even though he thought and said (I paraphrase), “I wouldn’t be surprised if we all end up dead out there in the wasteland somewhere.” I want to increase the faithfulness, while decreasing the morbidity of Puddleglum.

III. GENUINE FAITH HAS THE COURAGE TO SEE GOD’S POWER BEYOND OUR HUMAN WEAKNESS. Vv. 11-12

1. *Abraham and Sarah were too old to bear children.* The challenge here was to accept the promise of God when they were already past the childbearing years. Sarah had never given birth to a child. It was too late. Everyone knew it. Sarah knew it most of all. Anyone who has struggled with infertility understands her perspective well. Perhaps by this time in her life, she had settled into a quiet underlying sadness. And perhaps Abraham had also come to feel the same. *How could that original promise of God to “become a great nation” ever be fulfilled if they had not had even one child?*

2. *Abraham still believed God’s promise, even though it was not humanly possible, and God brought him descendants “as numerous as the stars.”* The crux of Abraham’s story comes in Genesis 15:6. Several years had already passed between the original promise made when Abram was 75 years old. He came before God and wondered aloud how the promise of a great nation could be fulfilled when the one who would inherit his estate was not even his child, but only a servant in his house, Eliezer of Damascus. The Lord asked him to look up at the stars. They were uncountable. This, said the Lord, will be like your descendants. At this point, the storyteller simply reports: “Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6, NIV). What a moment of unwavering faith! But time continued to pass without a child, and there were moments that Abraham’s faith crashed. He had moments of doubt. He even tried to accomplish God’s purposes by human ingenuity. He had a child by his handmaid Hagar, who was named Ishmael, thinking that this would fulfill the requirement. Much time elapsed between the original promise and finally the birth of Isaac. 25 long years went by before Abraham and Sarah had a son. But they still continued to look to the Lord, despite their waiting and their doubts.

⁵ See C. S. Lewis’s book *The Silver Chair* in *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

A—Here is the challenge for our faith: Will we put our trust in the promise of God despite our inability to bring it about by our own efforts?

I—Back in 2000, our community of churches attempted something drastic for the kingdom of God. We attempted to do the *Jesus* Video Project for our entire county. Put simply, this was an attempt to raise the funds, buy the *Jesus* videos (the story of Jesus taken precisely from the Gospel of Luke and performed dramatically) and then distribute them to every household in the county. I remember thinking the week before we actually did the project, how I had wondered many times if we would ever get to the point of the actual distribution. What began as an image in my mind of an army of Christians marching on the county on one day, carrying the Good News of Jesus in video format had become a dream, then an idea, then a plan, and finally a reality. We were just one week away from the distribution date when I taught a study from this exact passage of Scripture. We had had a half-dozen prayer services that were wonderful times of seeking the Lord in the company of other serious believers—from Baptist, to Assembly of God, to Christian Church, to Presbyterian Christians. It was thrilling to join forces with many others. It was exciting to get the news whenever money was given and whenever people became committed to help. \$50 came in the mail from a man in Gold Bar, Washington; another \$400 came at the training session on a Monday night prior to the project; another \$700 from a person connected to New Life Assembly in Kittitas right at the last minute.

After the dust settled, we had mobilized 13 churches and campus ministries in the valley, raised around \$10,000 and distributed more than 4,000 *Jesus* videos to the households in the county. After we finished, I was describing this project to a cousin on Jeannie's side of the family while at a family reunion. He worked for New Tribes Mission (now Ethnos 360) at their headquarters in Sanford, Florida. He also worked with the AWANA program for children. After I had finished describing all that had happened and what churches and campus ministries had participated, he said, "Wow! You would not have been able to get that many of your own Southern Baptist Churches to work together like that around here." That was a bittersweet comment. Bitter, in that the churches in his area are so competitive with each other. Sweet, in that the churches here had managed to cooperate for a kingdom-building project.

We are now envisioning another attempt at something of the same project, with a new and updated movie, available in various streaming formats as well as on disk. We can get all of the supplies for free (paid for by generous donors) from an organization called SaturateUSA. Can we do it again? If God wants us to do this, it will be done *by faith!*

Take it home (applications).

I. WHAT DOES GOD WANT TO ACCOMPLISH THROUGH OUR LIVES? IN THE LIVES OF OUR CHILDREN OR GRANDCHILDREN OR GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN?

1. Something old?
2. Something new?

II. IN WHAT WILL WE TRUST FOR SUCH A WORK TO BE ACCOMPLISHED?

1. Not in ourselves
2. We will trust in God, as He has revealed Himself through Jesus Christ.