

The Beat of a Different Drummer

Heroes, Part 1

Hebrews 11:1-3

One of my favorite memories of reaching the age of around 8 or 9 was being allowed in the summer to venture off by myself and, usually with one or two of my brothers, and run several city blocks and then race up the steps of a large white stone mansion of a building called The Main Norfolk Library.

I can still smell the aroma that greeted me as I entered that building housing tens of thousands of volumes and to us as youngsters, endless aisles of books waiting to be explored.

My missionary parents would be working back at the Servicemen's Center a few blocks away and they would allow us to go and spend an afternoon checking out all the books we could carry home.

You see, back in those days, power and freedom for an 8 year old kid was not in having your own cell phone or Ipad . . . no, no, no . . . power and freedom was in having your own library card.

You're thinking I must have come over on the Mayflower.

Truth was, I wasn't all that interested in learning anything. If it was educational, I wouldn't have been interested. In fact, if my mother had assigned me to do it over the summer so I wouldn't forget how to read, what fun would that be?

But I *was* interested in entering into the adventures of those real-life heroes of old.

I would leave that library with an armload of biographies of people like Davy Crocket and Daniel Boone and Lewis and Clark and Louis Pasteur, who invented a process in 1862, that slowed the spoilage of milk which caused diseases; that process, later named after him, would be called pasteurization.

He also developed the vaccine for curing rabbits. One assistant of Louis Pasteur's remembers seeing

Louis in the laboratory attempting to create this vaccination. He came to work and saw Louis with a test tube between his lips, leaning over a rabid bulldog which he and two other assistants were holding down on a table while he attempted to get some drops of saliva into that test tube directly from the bulldog's mouth – his face right next to a growling, rabid bulldog.

He's out of his mind! Now we would consider him a hero . . . oh, and he was successful in developing that particular vaccination and his first patient, a young boy who had been bitten by a rabid dog would live as a result.¹

I read the biography of George Washington Carver, a freed slave in the late 1800's who discovered invaluable methods of crop development including some 300 different ways to use peanuts, including the invention of peanut butter.

Are these guys heroes or what?!

Between pasteurized milk and peanut butter, you're just about set for life.

What adventures these people offered me as a kid . . . and still do.

I realized later in life that there was a common theme running through all of those biographies – those people saw life differently from the rest . . . their dial was tuned to a different setting; and they were willing to sacrifice everything to act upon their conviction that something was possible . . . something was doable . . . something was worth everything.

Warren Wiersbe – a former pastor who's brief chapter long biographies of 50 different Christians which is, by the way, wonderful reading – wrote that all the great achievers throughout history have been

men and women – explorers, inventors, liberators, and pioneers in every field – they have all been characterized by the steady eye that – note this – sees the invisible and pursues the impossible.ⁱⁱ Which invariably sets that person aside and apart and many times alone.

It was Henry Thoreau, the American philosopher who made the now famous remark, “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer.”ⁱⁱⁱ

We’ve expanded on that to refer to someone who is a leader or a pioneer or an artist or a visionary who marches to the beat of a different drummer.

Most of them – usually only after they’ve died – are given heroic status and respect for the ages.

Has it ever occurred to you that the first person deeply interested in retelling the lives of men and women throughout history is none other than God?

The majority of the Bible is biographical – giving us the histories of men and women, kings and nations, pioneers and prophets.

God happens to be committed to the concept that you and I learn best when truth is brought to life. And so throughout scripture He brings truth onstage for us, giving us the biographies of people both good and bad, virtuous and wicked, spiritual and sensual, sacrificial and self-absorbed.

I have only this past week begun reading the biography of G. Campbell Morgan, a man considered in the last century to be the prince of expositors in both Great Britain and America. And I didn’t get past the first page without being challenged by one of his cryptic statements; “Experience is a hard teacher and there are those who never learn.”^{iv}

Maybe it’s because we don’t read enough biography.

Is it any surprise then to listen as God through His apostles makes these kinds of statements about people in the past:

- ***Imitate those who through faith and patience inherited what has been promised (Hebrews 6:12);***

You can’t imitate someone you don’t know . . . which is why God allows us to get to know them through Biblical biography.

- Paul wrote of Israel’s history and made this comment to the believers in Corinth, ***Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction. (I Corinthians 10:11).***

- ***He also wrote to the believer’s living in Rome: Whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)***

In other words, God has given us the biographies of people and even nations to establish our hope and to learn how to live and walk by faith.

If you open your Bibles to the Book of Hebrews, you soon discover a letter written to Hebrew Christians surrounded by trouble and persecution.

If you jumped immediately to chapter 11 – you might miss the setting of this great chapter where God pulls out a dozen biographies of faithful pioneers.

In chapter 10 the writer of Hebrews writes, ***“Whatever you do, don’t throw away your confidence (v. 35).***

In other words, don’t throw in the towel . . . no matter how bad it looks and how difficult it gets . . . don’t give up . . . remember these servants of God who walked by faith.

Then is you skipped over to ***chapter 12***, he encourages them by saying, “Since you’ve now discovered that you are surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses – all these testimonies of the saints of old – just like them – keep pressing on . . . keep running the race set before you.”

Live by faith, run by faith . . . and you say, “Alright Lord, sign me up . . . but can you show me what that looks like?”

Hebrews 11 becomes His answer.

It’s almost a parenthesis between chapters 10 and 12 where it’s as if God says to all of us, “Sit down for a while and let me tell you some stories from real life . . . let me give you some biographies of people just like you – they’re ordinary people – none of them walked perfectly and none of them believed without moments of doubt and hesitation and even unbelief.

But let me show you in hindsight that there is this common thread running through their biographies – they saw the invisible and they pursued the impossible.”

They marched to a different drummer . . . in fact, the only thing they had going for them is the same thing available to all of us today – it is the drumbeat of faith.

Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 1 reads, Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Immediately the Bible student takes out his pencil and says to himself, this must be a definition of what faith is. And you begin to dissect the verse and come up, “faith is assurance and conviction about things I’m hoping for and things I can’t see.”

And that doesn’t seem to help fill in the blanks.

You’re left wondering, “Okay, how do I get that kind of assurance and how do I develop that kind of conviction?”

Let me remind you that there are several ways to define something.

One of those ways is **objectively**. In other words, this is what it looks like.

Another way is **subjectively**. That is, this is what it feels like.

A third way of defining something is **functionally**. This is what it acts like.

Let me illustrate it this way. Here on the stage I have a bicycle.

Let me define it for you objectively.

You need to know that the word bicycle is a compound word made up of bi – for 2 – and cycle, for wheels.

The wheels are made of rubber, spokes for reinforcement and metal. They are attached to a metal frame and on top of the frame is a seat whereupon you sit. These handlebars are objects to hold onto as you ride the bicycle through town.

And on and on and on . . . I am describing the object – thus, this is an objective definition.

But if I were to say, “Listen, if you will sit on this seat and ride off, you will experience a most wonderful sensation. You’ll have a front row seat to the beauty of your surroundings; the sunlight directly in your face . . . the wind whipping through your hair . . . well, for some of us.

Listen, there’s nothing quite like the thrill of riding down a hill at top speed with bugs in your teeth.

You see, I am defining this bicycle subjectively – what it means to experience it.

However, I can also define this bicycle functionally. I can actually introduce you to the bike and tell you how you operate it.

So – if you’ll sit on the seat – put one foot on the pedal and then push ahead, placing your other foot on the other pedal and balance yourself as you begin

to pump the pedals, balancing yourself as you ride along.

In this instance, I am defining the bicycle functionally – how it operates.

You need to know that *Hebrews 11* is not interested in a factual definition of faith but a functional description of faith.^v

The writer is actually saying, “This is what faith does.”

In fact, throughout this entire chapter, you’ll discover that the Spirit of God is going to show us living by faith, not by definition but by demonstration.

This is *how* to ride the bicycle of faith.

Let’s begin by breaking down this functional definition found in verses 1-3 – let me give you three principles that emerge from this opening statement.

1. Number one: Faith Continually Provides a Foundation for our Hope

The first part reads, “*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for.*”

Your translation might read, “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for . . .” Or, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for . . .”

That words assurance, confidence or substance in this first part are fine and good.

Let me give you another word to add to the list.

The Greek word is hupostasis – two words: stasis which means, “to stand” and hupo – which means “under”. To stand under. In other words, assurance or confidence or substance is a reference to the ground – the foundation – upon which our hope stands.^{vi}

And the verb is present tense which means that our faith continually builds the foundation which supports our hope.

And what are we hoping for?

- Christ’s return for His church
- Our future glorified bodies
- A reunion of all the departed believers in heaven
- A coming literal earthly kingdom where Christ will reign and we with Him on earth
- A future new world where we will eternally dwell as the Father’s House permanently descends to this newly created earth. (Revelation 21)

Listen, your faith doesn't make something true – it simply embraces the truth.^{vii}

And we know these things are true by means of our faith in the inspired words of God which is continually building a foundation upon which we stand.

The truth is, even a secular world is uneasy in its growing conviction that there is something more out there beyond . . .

I was in the Pharmacy a couple of days ago and a teenage girl was at the cash register. I said, "I hope you're having a good day?" She said, "Well, my foot is bothering me" and she went on to explain that she had been hurt in a soccer game and that it had ruined her hopes of being a dancer." I said, "You know God has a reason for everything." And she said, "I know, because it's given me time to focus on my religion . . . you see, I'm a pagan." I said, "I know some people like that; tell me what it means to you." She went on to tell me that she was studying earth worship and witchcraft. I said, "What do you plan to do?" She said, "I want to one day start my own coven." I said, and then what do you want to do after that? And she said, "I want to start my own earth church." I thought it was interesting she still wanted to go to church. I said, "Then what are you going to do after that?" She said, "I don't know . . . maybe become a teacher." I looked at her and said, "What are you going to do one minute after you die?" She kind of twisted her hands together and smiled and said, "I don't know . . . I hope the divine will be good to me." I said, "So you believe in God after all?" She said, "Well, no, not like that, you know . . . I mean . . . whatever." About then I could tell the other customer was ready to go and I left asking her to think about it more . . . I pray she will.

You see, her foundation is rickety at best . . . in the face of simple questions, it didn't stand up. She knew there was something more "out there" but her hopes were built on a flawed foundation that gave her no real, consistent hope.

Here's the first observation about faith: *faith continually provides a foundation for all our hopes*

Our faith isn't wistful longing . . . hoping that something comes to pass someday.^{viii}

It would be true to say then that faith is not a feeling. However, it would also be true to say that faith affects our feelings.

Having a growing foundation for our hope:

- it causes us to feel urgency toward winning the lost (2 Corinthians 5)

- it causes us to feel longing for the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8);
- it causes us to anticipate with anxious desire for the return of Christ (1 Thessalonians 1);
- it leads us to pray with contentment and thanksgiving (1 Thess. 4)
- it causes us to act with love and humility toward fellow believers (Col. 3)

Faith is not a feeling – it is a foundation for the certainty of our hope which will come to pass – but (!) faith can greatly impact the way we feel.

Think about it; what difference do you think it would make in the way I drove to the bank if my friend told me they had just deposited a million dollars in my bank account.

How do you think I'd feel? And how do you think I would allow my emotions to affect my driving over to the bank? I'd break the sound barrier. Actually, how I drove over to the bank and how I felt while driving there would all be determined on how much faith I had in the promise of my friend.

If I really trusted him, I would actually keep the speed limit; I might wait until tomorrow afternoon to go by the bank . . . I might go ahead and mail out some checks without ever going to the bank at all. You see, my faith in the promise of my friend, makes all the difference in the world to me personally.

That's why your faith and mine – and the lives we now live – are really nothing more than our estimation of the character of God.

Faith is our estimation of the character of God.

So this is the first observation of faith – faith provides a foundation for our hope.

2. Faith produces a conviction that invisible things exist.

Notice the text again, Faith is not only the *assurance of things hoped for, but – note this – faith is the conviction of things not seen.*

Your translation may read, "the *evidence* of things not seen."

It's a Greek word that appears only this one time in the entire New Testament in this form and it refers to proof.^{ix}

Aristotle used the word to refer to a convincing argument.^x

Your faith is the convincing argument – the proof of an invisible world.

So watch this – I love what he’s saying here. He’s not saying that your faith *proves* invisible things exist – he’s saying that your faith *is the proof* that invisible things exist.

And that’s enough! For our faith is founded on the living word of the living Lord.

And what are these invisible things you have become convinced of?

- That the cross of Christ was sufficient to pay the penalty for your sins – you didn’t see Him die – you didn’t see the invisible transaction of Christ’s death for the debt of your sin.
- By faith you believe in the resurrection of Christ too, for that matter, and we didn’t see that either.
- You believe in the ongoing intercession of Christ on our behalf
- You believe with conviction that the preached word will never be void or fruitless
- By faith you believe in the ministry of an invisible God the Spirit
- You believe in the resurrected and enthroned Messiah.
- You believe in an ongoing spiritual invisible warfare determined to discourage and defeat us as well as discredit the gospel
- You believe in the existence of invisible demons and angels.

I could again paraphrase this text again to capture the present tense verb by reading it this way: faith produces a growing conviction that invisible things really do exist

Eyesight proves the reality of the physical world
Faith proves the reality of the spiritual world.

Now we all know we can get help when it comes to physical sight.

I’m wearing glasses right now – not because I want to, but because I need to . . . they correct the weaknesses in my eyes brought on by age and too much peanut butter . . . I knew I’d pay the price one day.

I understand that you fisherman can buy fishermen’s sunglasses to remove much of the glare so you can see the fish below the surface of the water. That must have been what I needed.

You can buy night-vision lenses that help you penetrate the darkness – if you’re a hunter you can spot your game; if you’re a soldier you can identify the enemy or see some danger ahead.

That’s exactly what faith does for the believer:

- faith is corrective lenses which compensate for our weaknesses;
- faith is a pair of fisherman’s glasses, helping us to see past the glare around us and focus on our mission as fishers of men;
- faith is a pair of night-lenses which allow us to spot our enemy, that old serpent who puts a trap in our path.^{xi}

Faith helps us see in the dark.

Maybe your walking through a valley filled with shadows . . . the lights have almost all been turned off. You cling to the walking stick of faith.

God has brought you to a place where you cannot depend on your senses, but on the Spirit.

God is evidently building away at the foundation of your faith; He’s making it stronger, larger, deeper and higher.

The growing Christian is someone who comes to trust in the Spirit more than he does his senses.

You see, your eyes may give you physical *sight*; but your faith gives you *insight* into a spiritual world that’s for real.^{xii}

I love the real-life demonstration of this principle in the Book of 2 Kings 5. The army of the Arameans is plotting to capture the prophet Elisha and kill him. The king sends this great army during the night to surround the city where Elisha is staying.

The Bible tells us that the next morning, Elisha’s assistant got up early – probably to make coffee – and he went outside to get some water and the text says, “Behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city.”

And the assistant runs inside, wakes Elisha up and says, “Alas, my master – what shall we do?” Elisha goes outside with him and surveys the scene and then makes this rather amazing statement to his associate. **“Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” (2 Kings 6:16)**

Can you imagine? I can just see that assistant saying, “Elisha, you might be really good at prophesying, but you’re lousy at math...where are all those who are with us . . . if my math serves me right, there’s one of you and one of me – that makes

two of us – and there is an army of at least 1,000 trained warriors circling the city and they happen to have state of the art military equipment.

You've got your walking stick and I guess I can throw some rocks . . . what are we going to do?

And Elisha simply prays in *verse 17*, "***O Lord, open his eyes that he may see.***" ***And the Lord opened the servant's eyes and he saw . . . the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire . . .***"

The hosts of heaven were invisible, but they were there all the time.

Here's the principle: seeing is not believing – that's what everybody says – seeing is believing; no, faith declares, believing is seeing.^{xiii}

600 men armed to the teeth came into the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus. They have swords and clubs and you may know the story well enough to know that Peter grabs a sword and swings away, slicing off the ear of one of the men.

Matthew's Gospel records Jesus responding, "Put your sword back in its place; don't you know I have at my disposal . . .with one whisper of a word, twelve legions of angels?"

A legion was a term for a fighting unit of 6,000 Roman soldiers.

Jesus is saying that if He wanted to . . . with one word, he could have materialized at His side, 72,000 angels!

You can't see them, but they're real.

Faith provides a foundation for our Hope

Faith produces a conviction that invisible things exists

One more principle in this functional description of faith:

3. Faith prioritizes a lifestyle worthy of commendation

Notice verse 2. For by it men of old gained approval.

He's referring to Old Testament believers.

Gaining approval here means to receive great commendation by God and others.

Why the commendation? He tells us here – ***For by it*** – for by this kind of faith – this kind of hoping and seeing, the saints of old received commendation – they became worthy of the title – hero – they took the first step even though they couldn't see the whole staircase.

And the lights were out . . . and it was dark at times and steep at times; it took a toll on their bodies and their minds; it got slippery at times . . . but they pressed on, clinging with conviction to the reality of invisible things.

They are worth studying and imitating and admiring and following as Paul exhorted the New Testament believers to do.

Because in them we'll see a living demonstration of faith:

- that prioritizes a lifestyle worthy of commendation;
- that produces conviction of invisible reality
- that provides a foundation upon which we rest our hope.

We're about to see a demonstration of faith that marches to the beat of a different drummer.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 9/9/2012 by Stephen Davey.

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v Edgar Andrews, A Glorious High Throne (Evangelical Press, 2003), p. 342

vi Kenneth S. Wuest, Hebrews in the Greek New Testament (Eerdmans, 1947), p.193

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viii John MacArthur, The Power of Faith Study Guide (Word of Grace Communications, 1987), p. 9

ix Peter T. O'Brien, The Letter to the Hebrews (Eerdmans, 2010), p. 399

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xii Lea, p. 200

xiii G. Campbell Morgan, The Triumphs of Faith: Expositions of Hebrews 11 (Baker Book House, 1980), p. 21