

Greetings friends,

I ask that as we begin our spiritual journey together, we begin to take some time daily (if you are not already) to read the Scripture and pray. I thought it would be beneficial for us to focus on the same passage of Scripture for the week. This week, we will focus on Sunday's text, Hebrews 11:1-12:3. The Scripture read in service was abbreviated to 11:1-2, 8, 12:1-3. If you were not in present on Sunday and have not yet watched it, I encourage you to do so.

Format (this is a repeat from last week, and will be consistently present for anyone new and as a reminder for all):

Find a quiet place and time to focus on the Word, and to hear from God through it. It doesn't have to be long, for some it will be longer than others. I encourage you, if possible, to do this practice in the morning. You will then find that God brings it to your mind throughout your day.

For greater impact, I encourage you to get some paper and a pen and journal daily what thoughts and impressions God brings to mind. Write out also your own thoughts and your own prayers, making sure to leave space within your time for God's response. Listen intently, and notice what rises up within you- what you are thinking, feeling, memories that arise, and ideas that spring up. It may be something God would want you to address within yourself and/or with others. It may be something God is inspiring you to begin or end. God's possibilities are infinite! After time, it is often beneficial to go back and read what you have written, and notice how God has been moving in your life (and praise God for it!).

Begin with prayer, quieting yourself within and opening up to hearing what God would like to reveal to you. Praise God for who he is, for loving you, being with you, and more. Then ask God to speak to you; to open your heart and mind to hear his message. (if you are journaling, you could write out the prayer)

Read the Scripture passage over twice; once as a read through, and the second time slowly, meditatively. Notice what God illuminates for you. Notice what words or ideas are "jumping off the page at you," impacting you from the Scripture. Ask God why that is being highlighted for you. What is God saying to you? What is God asking you to say, do, change, pray about, etc.? What is the application for my life today? **Most importantly- what am I going to do about it? (If you are journaling you could write it all out, which reinforces it in a greater way)

I have put together some daily questions based upon the Scripture. You may use those, but also feel free to deviate away from it if God is leading you there. They are simply offered to prompt contemplation with God. There is much more in this passage, feel free to delve in more!

At the end of your time pray again. I recommend praying throughout, but the ending prayer would include praise, thanking God for revelation, and asking for the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal, bringing to mind God's will. Ask God for the courage, empowerment, and opportunity to do what you have determined God is asking you to do.

Hebrews 11:1- 12:3 (yes- it's a long one! What was read on Sunday has been bolded)

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ² This is what the ancients were commended for. ³ By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. ⁴ By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead. ⁵ By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: "He could not be found, because God had taken him away." For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. ⁷ By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith. **⁸ 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.** ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹ And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹² And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. ¹³ 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, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. ¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, ¹⁸ even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death. ²⁰ By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future. ²¹ By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. ²² By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones. ²³ By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. ²⁴ By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. ²⁵ He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶ He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. ²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. ²⁸ By faith he kept the Passover and the application of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. ²⁹ By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned. ³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days. ³¹ By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient. ³² And

what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets,³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions,³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.³⁵ Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection.³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.³⁷ They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.³⁹ These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised,⁴⁰ since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. **12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**

DAILY QUIET TIME WITH GOD:

Monday:

11:1 “Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” This passage of Scripture is focused on faith, specifically faith in God through Jesus Christ. In our lives, we can find ourselves having varying degrees and focuses of faith. This could be dependent on circumstances, or past experiences, or just an unknowing. Sometimes we can find ourselves having faith in people or things instead of God, often without even realizing it. Take a moment and reflect on your life- family, friends, finances, health, job, school, ministry, etc. What areas are you fully trusting God with? What makes you believe that? Are there areas that you have not been willing or able to fully surrender in trust to God? Why do you think that is? Is there someone or something that you may be having more faith in than God? What would it take to fully put all of your life into God’s hands and live by faith? What is God asking you to do differently?

Tuesday:

Deep and abiding faith is developed through a deep and abiding relationship with God. That is how we know and understand God’s character. John Wesley (the one who started the Methodist movement) taught that some of the ways to grow in relationship with God are to practice what

he called “means of grace.” They were divided into two types. “Works of Piety” and “Works of Mercy”:

“Works of Piety,” include:

Individual Practices – reading, meditating upon, and studying the scriptures, prayer, fasting, regularly attending worship, healthy living, and sharing our faith with others

Communal Practices – regularly share in the sacraments, Christian conferencing (accountability to one another), Bible study, and Small Groups (Life Groups)

“Works of Mercy” include:

Individual Practices - doing good works, visiting the sick, visiting those in prison, feeding the hungry, and giving generously to the needs of others

Communal Practices – seeking justice, ending oppression and discrimination (for instance Wesley challenged Methodists to end slavery), and addressing the needs of the poor

Of all of these “means of grace,” what are the areas in which you already participate? What could you begin doing, or do more of, to grow in faith? Is God leading you to something- one of these or something else? Are you ready and willing to do so? Why or why not?

Wednesday:

The writer of Hebrews used examples of people that we learn about in Scripture who lived their life by faith. The examples were used to build the faith in the Hebrews community, that by hearing, they would be encouraged, inspired, and their faith would grow. It’s important to also do that today, continuing as the “great cloud of witnesses,” as telling faith stories builds faith- in those who hear it, but also in the one telling it! What is a faith story from your own life? Who could you tell your story to? Pray for an opportunity to share your stories of faith, and by faith, tell your story. Reflect afterwards about how it felt to share.

Thursday:

Some of the examples given of people who lived by faith had experienced horrible circumstances. How does that make you feel? Was it inspirational, or did it “freak you out”? Why? Have you ever experienced hardship, difficulties, trials, or horrible circumstances? If so, what role did faith have in getting you through it all? Was there a difference in the way you experienced faith, and God, while going through awful circumstances versus looking back and reflecting on what you experienced? How would you describe it to another believer? How would you describe it to an unbeliever? Ask God where you need to grow and for the power to do so. Ask God for opportunities to build the faith of others.

Friday:

There were many people from the Scriptures that the writer of Hebrews could have selected as examples of people who lived by faith, yet the author chose an interesting mix. If you have some time, look into each of the characters, as they may have some characteristics or actions that may be surprising. For instance, Rahab was a prostitute, and David was an adulterer and murderer. Yet with each, they moved by faith, which is pleasing to God. Rahab protected the spies of Israel, and so she and her family were protected when the city was attacked. She was then married to Salmon, of the tribe of Judah, and is listed in Jesus' lineage! David genuinely repented and continued to be described by God as a "man after my own heart." David was also in the lineage of Jesus! What do these examples tell you about mercy, when we don't get what we "deserve"? What does it tell you about grace, the unmerited, steadfast love of God? In what ways should this understanding be reflected when we encounter and minister to others? Is there an attitude that God is asking you to examine? Is there an action God is asking you to take?

Saturday:

In this passage, the writer of Hebrews encourages the faith community to "throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith." Ask God to show you anything and everything that may be hindering your faith. Ask God to reveal to you any sin that has been keeping you from living fully into your faith. As these come to mind, acknowledge, confess, and repent. Repent means to "turn around," to change direction. Ask God for the power and the ability to change anything you have discerned that is blocking your faith. Thank God, and trust that God is moving in your life!