

## What Does Faith Feel Like?

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Rich Nathan  
August 15-16, 2015  
Heroic Faith Series  
Hebrews 11.23-28

Anyone who picks up a Bible will immediately discover that faith is a really big deal in the scriptures. In the New International Version of the English Bible which we use here at Vineyard Columbus, the word “faith” appears 270 times. The word “trust” appears 89 times. The word “belief” appears 184 times. Over 500 times in the Bible we read about faith or trust or believing. Faith is a really big deal in the Bible.

But people are really confused about what faith is and that’s why we’re doing a series over the course of the summer on faith, a series that we called Heroic Faith. It looks at the faith of people in the Old Testament times – people like Noah, Abraham, and Moses.

Now, we’ve approached the definition of faith in different ways. We’ve discovered that God has left not proofs of his existence, or his activity in the world, but clues – things that a thoughtful person can discover about God – our desire for justice, our sense of right and wrong, our love for beauty, and our ability to reason. The foundation for all of these things, we’ve learned, is God. We said that faith is the confidence we have in God based upon the evidence that we’ve evaluated, that we’ve thought about. We said that faith is the hand that grabs hold of God; faith is the eye that perceives the activity of God. We said faith is the mouth that takes God in. Faith reaches forward into the future that God has and brings it into our present experience. We’ve talked about many of the different ways that the Bible describes this rich, multifaceted thing called faith.

But today I want to ask a different question – what does faith feel like? People will say, “I wish I had your faith. You seem to have a peace about you, a confidence regarding the future. You don’t worry the way I do about everything. I wish I had your faith. But I really struggle with faith. I have lots of doubts. I still have lots of questions about God or about Christianity.” And sometimes in our minds what we think faith feels like is absolute certainty of a particular outcome when we pray. So, if I’m asking God for a healing for me or someone I love, does faith feels like I am completely certain that this person will be healed as I am praying? Does faith feel like no doubts have entered my mind, at all? Does faith feel like mathematical certainty?  $2+2=4$ .

What I would like to propose today is that many of you who wonder if you even have faith because you’re not certain, because you struggle with doubts, because sometimes faith feels elusive, it doesn’t feel as real as a car, what I would like to suggest to many of you today is that

you actually do have faith. And that in the Bible faith doesn't feel like complete certainty. It doesn't feel like math.

What does faith feel like? That's the title of my talk today. Let's pray.

Hebrews 11:23–28 (NIV)

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.

The first thing I want to point out in this text is that faith is a choice. Look with me at v. 25:

Hebrews 11:25 (NIV)

25 He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

Most folks believe that faith is something you either have or you don't have. Maybe faith is an inborn trait like musicality – some people have rhythm, some don't. Some people are reasonable and thoughtful and others have faith. That's what I thought growing up. But in this text we find that faith is a choice. It is a decision regarding how we're going to look at life based on the clues that God has given us, based on the evidence. Faith is a choice. Moses chose.

So, what does faith feel like? First, faith feels like a choice to see.

Faith feels like a choice to see

Throughout Hebrews 11 seeing is a really fundamental theme. Look at v. 1:

Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)

11 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

And in v. 3:

Hebrews 11:3 (NIV)

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.

v. 13:

Hebrews 11:13 (NIV)

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.

And now in v. 23:

Hebrews 11:23 (NIV)

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.

Faith is the choice to see. This is certainly the case in Moses' life. If you look back at his story in the Old Testament book of Exodus, we read this in Exodus 2:11:

Exodus 2:11 (NIV)

11 One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people.

What does faith feel like? Faith feels like a choice to see. This past week I was sitting outside of Stauf's in German Village working on this message. There were about 15 people sitting outside at different tables. This woman came up on the walkway right by the tables and she yelled out: "Would anyone here give me some money? I need some money to buy gas for my van." She went on yelling loudly about her problems. So everyone did what people do in that situation. They looked down. Her whole approach was embarrassing. She was dirty. She was loud and pushy.

And everything in me wanted to do what the other folks in that coffee shop were doing. I wanted to look down and look away. But because of my relationship with Christ, I chose to look at her, to really look at her and catch her eye. So she knew that there was another person looking. I said to her, "I will help you out." So we went and talked. I offered her some help.

Faith feels like a choice to see, to look, when everything in you wants to look away. In Jesus's famous story in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus talks about a man who is going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he is mugged and left in the street. A priest passes by going up to the Temple and he looks away from the man. A Levite, another religious man, walks around this Jewish man lying in the street and he looks away. And in Jesus' parable, a Samaritan walks by and we read this in Luke 10:33:

Luke 10:33 (NIV)

33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

Faith feels like a choice to see and to not look away. In Matthew 25 Jesus separates people on the Day of Judgment. Those he receives into his Kingdom say to him:

Matthew 25:37–39 (NIV)

37 “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

Faith feels like a choice to see.

Recently there has been a mammoth controversy concerning some secret videos that were filmed of executives from Planned Parenthood, videos taped by pro-life activists who were posing as fetal organ buyers. In the videos these Planned Parenthood executives were drinking a glass of wine, eating salad at a nice posh restaurant, while one of them says,

*We’ve been very good at getting heart, lung, liver, because we know that, so I’m not going to crush that part, I’m going to basically crush below, I’m going to crush above, and I’m going to see if I can get it all intact.*

And then they’re haggling over the price of a baby’s liver, of a baby’s heart, a baby’s lungs. And one of the executives in one of the videos says:

*Let me just figure out what others are getting, and if this is in the ballpark, that’s fine, if it is still low, we can bump it up. I want a Lamborghini.*

Planned Parenthood has hired a really expensive public relations firm. The PR firm coached them to say they were tricked, that the videos were heavily edited and that they are misleading. Of course the full videos have been released. But I found it really interesting the other day when the Press Secretary for the White House was asked what he thought of these Planned Parenthood videos of someone laughing about selling a baby’s heart in order to buy a Lamborghini. The Press Secretary said, “I didn’t see the videos.” He was further asked “Has anyone seen them?” The Press Secretary answered, “I’m not aware of anyone who has seen the videos.”

Faith is a choice to see and to not look away.

So, let me ask you a question. What might God want you to choose to see and not look away from, to see and not turn away? It is by seeing, by looking, by choosing to not turn away that we gain God’s heart. It is by seeing, by looking, by choosing to not turn away that we grow in faith. What might God want you to see?

Maybe for you it is foster children in our city – to look at them, to see kids in the foster system that God might put his heart in you and to put a child into your home. Maybe God wants you to

really see someone who is far from God and what their life feels like where they are headed. Maybe God wants you to see an elderly person who is isolated in some assisted-living facility, to see them and to want to show them God's heart to relieve their loneliness.

Faith feels like a choice to see. And, specifically, faith feels like a choice to see potential in a child.

Faith feels like a choice to see potential in a child

Look with me at v. 23:

Hebrews 11:23 (NIV)

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.

Some of you know the story from the Old Testament. The patriarch Jacob and his family went down to Egypt to escape a famine in the Promised Land. Jacob's son, Joseph, had risen to become ruler over all the land of Egypt – the most powerful person in Egypt other than the Pharaoh. Joseph was kind of like the Prime Minister to the Pharaoh. But after Joseph died, we read that another Pharaoh came along who didn't know Joseph and he began to be concerned about the multiplication of all of these Hebrews, all of these Jews living in Egypt. He was afraid that they were becoming powerful and so he decided to enslave them. But they became even more numerous.

And so the Pharaoh issues a decree that the baby boys should be killed – thrown into the Nile River when they were born so that they wouldn't be a threat. Moses' parents decided to not go along with this. We're told in the Book of Exodus:

Exodus 2:1–2 (NIV)

2 Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, 2 and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months.

I love that translation – he was a fine child. You can hear her say, "My oh my, that boy is fine!" Literally, it meant that he was a beautiful child. There was something lovely about the baby – not only in terms of his features. He must have been very good looking. But there was something special that Moses' mother and father saw about him. They saw something of God at work in this child's life. They saw potential.

Faith is a choice to see potential in a child. Children raise for us the issue of faith. It takes faith to have a child, especially during hard times. It takes faith to have a child. So many people today say that with the world in such terrible shape, how could you possibly bring a child into this kind of world? I don't think you'd want to bring a child into this kind of world, if all that you're able to see is in this world. But faith chooses to look beyond this world to a good and loving God, who

is in control of the world and in control of our lives, who is committed to your good and to your child's good. It takes faith to have a child.

When faith is gone, people stop having children. That's what's happening in Europe right now. Europeans have lost their faith and they've stopped having children. In virtually every European country, the population is declining. Europeans are not reproducing themselves. They're not involved in the most basic of human activity – having kids and replacing themselves. As Europeans have lost their faith, they've lost their desire to have kids. Demographers are saying that in many European nations the population will be cut in half in the next 50 years apart from immigration.

Without faith we say, "I'm not going to be hassled by a child. I'm not going to have my personal freedom, my personal space, my personal pleasure interrupted by taking care of this little one, someone I'm going to have to sacrifice for, someone will rob me of time, freedom and money." It takes faith to have a child.

But in addition, it takes faith to see potential in a child, to look below the surface and beyond the doctors' diagnoses. It takes faith to see potential in a child that the doctor says is on the autism spectrum. It takes faith to see potential in a child the doctor says is bi-polar. It takes faith to see potential in a child that some expert has put a label on and someone is treating as damaged goods. There are lots of kids in our city that have been labeled. They're growing up in tough circumstances. They are already struggling in elementary school. Maybe someone put a label on them.

Faith feels like a choice to see potential in a child. Vineyard Columbus, your church, is choosing to exercise faith by seeing the potential of children in our city.

The Vineyard Community Center recently received a \$105,000 grant from the State of Ohio to mentor children in five North Columbus elementary schools. Our church has been involved with mentoring and tutoring public school kids for over a decade. Now the government has recognized Vineyard's work and said to us, "Would you mentor children in five North Columbus Public Schools?"

We want to recruit a hundred people from this congregation to participate, who are full of faith and can see the potential in a child. I've asked Kwesi Kambon, who worked for years as an administrator in the Columbus Public Schools and is now on our pastoral staff, to lead this initiative. We want to recruit at least 100 members of Vineyard Columbus to mentor kids which would mean meeting with them 2x a month – one time on a Saturday morning and one time during the week. We'll provide the training for this mentoring. Or you could become part of the support team at one of the five schools, maybe writing letters of encouragement to teachers, to provide school supplies and books to kids so that they can read at home, to assist in cleaning up the schools.

Whether you are a mentor or part of the support team, there is something we can all do. I've asked Kwesi and the members of his team to be in the lobby at our Cooper Road campus after all of the services where you can find out more information. For those of you at our other campuses, you can simply write to [Kwesi.kambon@vineyardcolumbus.org](mailto:Kwesi.kambon@vineyardcolumbus.org).

[Kwesi.kambon@vineyardcolumbus.org](mailto:Kwesi.kambon@vineyardcolumbus.org)

But our decision to mentor is an act of faith. Faith chooses to see potential in a child.

What does faith feel like? Faith feels like a choice to see. Faith feels like a choice to see potential in a child. Faith feels like a choice to get on the down escalator.

Faith feels like a choice to get on the down escalator

Hebrews 11:24–25 (NIV)

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.

We read in Exodus 2:10:

Exodus 2:10 (NIV)

10 When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water."

If you've seen the cartoon Prince of Egypt, you know that Moses became Pharaoh's grandson. He was Pharaoh's daughter's son. And for the first 40 years of his life, he moved effortlessly from success to success. Here is what we read in Acts 7:22:

Acts 7:22 (NIV)

22 Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

Moses was great looking. He had a fabulous education. He went to the finest universities in Egypt. And again in Acts 7:22:

Acts 7:22 (NIV)

22 Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

Josephus great Jewish historian indicates that when the Ethiopians attacked Egypt and were on the verge of defeating them, Pharaoh appointed Moses to be General over the Egyptian army. And under his dynamic leadership, the Ethiopians were driven back and defeated. We don't

know if this is just part of tradition, or if this is historically true, but we do know that Moses was not only handsome, not only exceptionally well-educated, but he was also a brilliant leader and a brilliant communicator. Moses at age 40 was at the top of his game. He was a person we would say had a really high ceiling.

What does faith feel like? Faith feels like a choice to commit career suicide, to get on the down escalator. It feels like a choice of financial insecurity, a choice to risk, a choice of the hard way instead of the easy way. I think of Nelson Mandela.

Photo of Nelson Mandela

Mandela was born into royalty, in the line of the tribal chief. He was one of a little handful of Black lawyers in all of South Africa, a brilliant speaker, and a little giant among men. Mandela was 6'4" in a country where many of the people in his generation were much shorter. He was a great athlete and a boxer. Women liked him; he was good looking. He was well-educated, well-spoken, financially secure; he had a nice home. He chose to get on the down escalator, to be imprisoned for 27 years, to suffer with his people so that they could be freed from the brutality of apartheid.

Do you know anyone who has chosen to get on the down escalator? Back in the late 1800s there was a group of men called The Cambridge Seven – six students from Cambridge University and one from the Royal Military Academy. In 1885 these seven men decided to become missionaries in China. They'd all become Christians who were greatly influenced by Hudson Taylor's book China's Spiritual Need. One of them, a man by the name of CT Studd, was the best known English cricket player of his day, a great athlete, from an extremely wealthy family.

Photo of CT Studd

He got on the down escalator. He gave all of his money away. He chose financial insecurity. He worked in China and then he went to Africa and started a huge missions agency in Africa. Studd's reason for doing all of this was really simple. He said:

*How could I spend the best years of my life in living for the honors of this world, when thousands of souls are perishing every day?*

Do you know anyone who has gotten on the down escalator because of their faith? One Cairo woman named Maggie Gobran, who is the Mother Teresa of Egypt, is known as Mama Maggie.

Photo of Maggie Gobran

There is a new book out about her titled

Book Cover – Mama Maggie: The Untold Story of One Woman's Mission to Love the Garbage Kids of Egypt



She is giving her life to serve Christ by loving the poorest of the poor. Like Mother Teresa, she has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize many times. Unlike Mother Teresa, Mama Maggie was born a very wealthy woman. She was a successful business woman, a university professor in computer science. She loved jewelry and nice cars and clothes. One day with some friends she visited one of Cairo's garbage slums and she decided not to look away. In the midst of unbelievable filth, something we could not even imagine in the US, were thousands of men, women and children and Maggie was instantly drawn to them, especially the children. So she has been running this huge charity called Stephen's Children to minister to impoverished Christian, Muslim and Baha'i children.

Let me show you a video of one man, who chose to get on the down escalator because of his faith. His name is Jason Brown, the former pro-football player, one of the best centers in the NFL.

Jason Brown Video Clip

Why do people ever choose to get on the down escalator? Look at v. 26 with me.

Hebrews 11:26 (NIV)

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.

That word "regarded" literally means "accounted" or "balancing this against that." Moses carefully weighed the pros and cons as he was thinking about getting on the down escalator. He didn't make a snap decision to give up the palace, wealth, and his career. He didn't just wake up one day and decide to commit career suicide. He thought about it and weighed things out. What does faith feel like?

Faith feels like a choice to pursue true greatness

It is really interesting what the folks I mentioned who got on the down escalator say about themselves. They don't say, "You know what? I really sacrificed because I am an amazing person." Mama Maggie went through this thought process, this weighing, this calculation after repeated visits to the garbage dumps where she chose not to look away from the children. She weighed her options. She could remain a computer science professor, continue to enjoy a really pleasant easy life. But this thought hit her.

*We don't choose where or when to be born. We don't choose where or when to die. But we can choose to either help others or to turn away.*

And then she said:

*God wanted to promote me by having me leave the best and the smartest and to go to the poorest of the poor. God wanted to promote me.*

I love this – “God wanted to promote me.” That’s what it feels like. There’s a calculation that faith does and you feel like you are not sacrificing, but that you are being promoted. CT Studd, a great English cricket player, who was very wealthy, gave it all up to be a missionary first in China, then in Africa, said:

*I know that cricket would not last, and honor would not last, and nothing in this world would last, but it was worthwhile living for the world to come.*

Jason Brown, the football player, said,

*Yeah, there are a lot of people praying out there in the NFL, but when I think about a life of greatness, I think about a life of service.*

Faith feels like a calculation. It feels like a choice to pursue true greatness.

Recently, I read something written by a famous journalist, who said:

*My career as a journalist has afforded me opportunities to interview “stars,” including NFL football greats, movie actors, music performers, best-selling authors, politicians, and TV personalities. These are the people that dominate the media. We fawn over them, pouring over the minutiae of their lives: the clothes they wear, the food they eat, the aerobic routines they follow, the people they love, the toothpaste they use. Yet I must tell you that, in my limited experience, I have found...that our “idols” are as miserable a group of people as I have ever met. Most have troubled or broken marriages. Nearly all are incurably dependent on psychotherapy. In a heavy irony, these larger than life heroes seem tormented by self-doubt. I’ve also spent time with people I call “servants.” Doctors and nurses who work among the ultimate outcasts, leprosy patients in rural India. A Princeton graduate who runs a hotel for the homeless in Chicago. Health workers who gave up high paying jobs to serve in a backwater town in Mississippi. Relief workers in Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and other repositories of human suffering. The PhDs I met in Arizona who are now scattered throughout the jungles of South America translating the Bible into obscure languages. I was prepared to honor and admire these servants, to hold them up as inspiring examples. I was not prepared to envy them. Yet as I now reflect on the two groups side by side, stars and servants, the servants clearly emerge as the favored ones, the graced ones. Without question, I would rather spend time among the servants than among the stars: they possess qualities of depth and richness and even joy that I have not found elsewhere.*

Let me show you a picture.

Photo of Married Couple who has been married for 68 years

This picture has made the rounds on social media. This is a married couple, who have been married for 68 years. They're both in the hospital. The husband said, "I can't be apart from my wife. We've been together for 68 years. I love her and she loves me."

Why do people get on the down escalator? Because by faith they have weighed things and have chosen to pursue true greatness. Who has lived a successful life? The Hollywood star who has been married 5-6 times, or this couple, who in old age are holding hands in the hospital?

Faith feels like a choice to pursue greatness. And my last point:

Faith feels like a choice to rely on Christ alone

Hebrews 11:28 (NIV)

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.

After nine plagues, God decides to pour out his full justice. He sends out the destroyer, the angel of death. If you read back in the Book of Exodus, you will see that in the first nine plagues whether it was frogs, locusts, hail, or some kind of disease, Israel was not subject to these plagues. The plagues fell on the Egyptians, but Israel was completely safe. The land of Goshen where they lived was not subject to any of the plagues. It got dark on the Egyptian side of the line, but not on the Israelite side.

What is so surprising about the 10<sup>th</sup> plague is that God says to the Israelites, "The destroyer is coming to everyone, because everyone has sinned against me! Don't think that just because you are a Jew, that the angel of death will pass you by. Unless you keep the Passover and sprinkle the blood of a lamb on the doorposts of your house, you are going to be destroyed along with the Egyptians. Unless you, Israelites, take an evasive action, unless you do something, sprinkle the blood of a lamb around your door, the destroyer will visit your home and your firstborn will die along with the firstborn of the Egyptians.

See, salvation is not a racial thing. It is not an ethnic thing. Ethnicity had nothing to do with the people who were saved from God's judgment. Neither did education, or whether their home was headed by men or women, or by single parents. It had nothing to do with folks' social status. The only issue was whether the blood of the lamb was on the doorposts of their houses, whether they were keeping the Passover by faith. God says to the Israelites: If a lamb dies and you are under its blood, you won't have to die.

What does all of this mean? The Passover pointed ahead of itself to the wonderful day when the last of the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist, pointed to Jesus of Nazareth and he said to

his disciples, “Behold the Lamb of God.” Not a lamb of God, but THE Lamb of God. God does not spare us because of the death of some little lamb. God spares us because he didn’t spare his only Son.

What does faith feel like? Faith feels like the confession of a person who says, “I was going to be destroyed. I was under God’s judgment. But I took refuge under the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ.” Notice what the Israelites did not put on their doorposts. They did not put on their doorposts their genealogy, what family line they came from. That would not have rescued them. They didn’t put on their doorposts their GPAs, or their bank account balances, or a list of all the good things they’ve ever done for people, or their tax forms or proof of their charitable donations. They didn’t put on the doorposts of their houses the record of their attendance at church, the blue ribbon they won for their perfect attendance at Sunday School, the fact that they hadn’t missed Mass for 25 years, or the number of times they took the Eucharist, the recommendations letters from their children about what a great mother or father they were, the eulogies spoken at their funerals.

What does faith feel like? Faith feels like you are relying on Christ alone and on his blood shed on the cross to save you. That’s Christian faith. That’s what you’re signing up for, if by faith you choose to be a Christian – relying on Christ and him alone. Let’s pray.

## What Does Faith Feel Like?

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- I. Faith feels like a choice to see
- II. Faith feels like a choice to see potential in a child
- III. Faith feels like a choice to get on the down escalator
- IV. Faith feels like a choice to pursue true greatness
- V. Faith feels like a choice to rely on Christ alone