

# Building A Life Of Faith

## Hebrews 11

On two different occasions I have visited the city of Cluj-Napoca in Romania. On both occasions, I was taken by the statues. As you walk around downtown Cluj you can't miss them. There are statues to heroes of Romania's past. Generals, political leaders, poets, writers. Most of their surnames end in "escu"- Illescu, Ion Antonescu and so on. London is the same. Statues everywhere. There are memorials to Britain's heroes - the Duke of Wellington, Winston Churchill, Lord Nelson, Oliver Cromwell, and many other great heroes of the past. Geneva has its reformation wall, with statues of Theodore Beza, William Farel, John Knox and of course, the most important of all, John Calvin. Women are not forgotten in Geneva either. Catherine Cheynels courageous act of pouring boiling soup on the attackers during the Escalade is commemorated on a fountain in the city.

These statues all have something in common. They were put there to commemorate people who were full of hope and faith. People of courage. Forward looking people. Inspiring people. I have never yet seen a statue to commemorate a cautious, negative, critical or timid person. Actually I've never seen a statue erected to honour a committee either. We make statues for heroes - the people we put on pedestals. We make statues for leaders. People who see the reality of the situation as it is now, but who also look ahead to what the situation could be. People who lead. People who rally others and call them to become something better than they are. People who inspire faith in others. People who stubbornly refuse to accept the status quo.

In the New Testament, you will find a whole chapter dedicated to the heroes of Israel's past. Here is a selection of scriptures from Hebrews Chapter 11. I don't have time to read it all.

***"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. 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.***

***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 comes by faith. 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. 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. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith Abraham, even though he was past age-- and Sarah herself was barren--was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. 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. All these people were still living by faith when they died.***

***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. By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. 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. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.***

***And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 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. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection.***

***Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned ; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated--the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.” (Hebrews 11 Selection)***

So who gets a mention in the heroes of faith hall of fame? People like Noah, who trusted God and built a boat while everyone was laughing at him. People like Abraham who heard God's say "Go"! I'm sure he said "Where to?" And I am sure God's reply would have been "Never mind where to - just go - I'll show you". Moses was a hero of faith. God told him to eyeball the Pharaoh and tell him to let his free workforce take a permanent holiday. Risky stuff. You could lose your head for that. Rahab risked her life to hide some spies in her house. Gideon, the army commander beat an army that hugely outnumbered his. David, the shepherd boy who catapulted Goliath into the history books with a stone. I'm sure such a thing had never entered Goliath's head before. Samuel the priest who had to go and tell the King to stop fooling around with other men's wives.

The interesting thing is that in this list of Israel's heroes not one of them were commended because they were born beautiful like Britney Spears. Not one of them were heroes because they had exceptional talent like Michael Schumacher or Roger Federer. None of them made the list of heroes because they were super bright like Albert Einstein. They were heroes because of their faith.

### **Ordinary People – Extraordinary God.**

27 times in Hebrews Chapter 11, they are commended because they trusted God. Do you think God chose Noah because he could build good boats? Or Abraham because he loved camping? Or David because he could write nice songs? No it wasn't because they had exceptional talent, it was because they had hearts of faith. They were heroes because they developed the ability to trust God, and that's why they made it into the hall of fame. God picks people whose hearts are right and gives them the opportunity to become a hero of faith.

Mary was a teenage girl who trusted God and gave birth to the Messiah. John the Baptist was a fellow who hung out in the desert dressed in a loin cloth eating locusts. I wonder if when he was a little boy, his Mum would say to him, "No more honey until you have eaten up all your locusts". John the Baptist wasn't your average, straight, God fearing Jew, but as far as God was concerned, his heart was right. Do you get this truth? You can be a hero of faith even if you haven't got a PhD, or you don't look like Claudia Schiffer, or you don't play golf like Tiger Woods. You can be a hero if your heart is right.

Let me tell you about a hero of faith from a church where I was the Pastor. Luarna Lappin was a 20-year-old nanny. She's not highly educated. If you saw the way God made her, you would realise she's never going to be a fashion model. She had only been to an airport once in her life and had never flown in a plane before. But there were two things about Luarna that were very special. She loved Jesus, and she loved kids. When we decided to take a team of young people and adults to Romania, each team member had to find 4000 dollars. Luarna was in a low paid job but she was able to save 1500 dollars herself. Then she started working hard, praying hard, and trusting God for another 2500 dollars. Guess what? God rewarded her faith and that money miraculously came in. She got to Romania and was an instant hit with the Romanian kids and picked up the language very quickly. The Romanians even said to her - you look just like one of us - you could be Romanian! While she was in Romania she was offered a six month job as a nanny to a missionary couple. Now there was another step of faith to take. Would she trust God and stay in Romania when the team left? After prayer and discussion with some of us who were leading the team, she decided to trust God, and stay.

Within a week of the team arriving home we got an E-mail to say that she had got on a bus by herself, travelled across the city on her own, back to the slum area where we ran children's programs. As she was walking up the street all of the kids came running out of the apartment blocks yelling "Luarnas here!, Luarnas here!". She was mobbed by Romanian kids from the slums. Do you see what God does with a little bit of faith?

How you become a hero of faith? What does it take to get into the faith hall of fame? I'll give you three things from Hebrews 11 that will help you become a person of faith. The first is found in verse 6. **"Without faith it is impossible to please God, because any one who comes to Him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek Him".(Hebrews 11:6 NIV)** If you want to become a hero of faith;

### **1. Seek God.**

Start saying yes every time God tells you to do something. Earnestly seek him. Get to know him. Pursue him. Make the effort to know him. You know what it's like when you begin a dating relationship? The flowers, the phone calls, the tickets to those special events, the candlelight dinners. That's pursuit. It's wasting enjoyable time together. Start wasting time with God. Pursue Him. Earnestly seek Him. As you get to know him, you will find yourself loving the things he loves, and doing the things he does. You will find yourself loving people. You will find yourself doing the things that Jesus would do. Faith is not a noun, it's a verb. Faith is not something you believe, it's something you do because you believe. You can't please God unless you believe he exists and living in such a way that you are depending on him. And the great thing is, he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Do you want to be a hero of faith? Here's a second thing you can do.

### **2. Take Risks.**

Every one of these people in Hebrews 11 were heroes because they took risks. Not stupid risks, but trusting God risks. Abraham stepped out of a comfortable life to live in a tent. Rahab risked her life to hide spies. What you risking?

Some of you wonder why your Christian life is so boringly dull. You have never done anything risky in your life. You've never given God the chance to show his power. He doesn't need to work miracles for you, because you manufacture your own miracles. Start taking some risks! Get involved in a ministry that gets you out of your comfort zone. Give some of your money away - more than you think you can afford. Share your faith with an unbeliever. Do a serious bible study course. Disciple a new Christian or young person. Offer to pray for your neighbour. Talk to someone on the bus on the way to work. Invite a stranger home for lunch.

That's the way the Christian life is meant to be lived - on the edge! Without faith it's impossible to please God. If there is no risk, there's no faith. One final thing to become a hero of faith.

### **3. Persevere In Faith.**

Just because you and I are living by faith doesn't mean everything will go right. Abraham was promised a son. Can you imagine how disappointed he was when he blew out 99 candles on his birthday cake and he still had no son to join him at the party? All these heroes of faith, lived by faith, persevered by faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.

Sometimes we don't have any idea what effect our persevering faith can have on other people. If you go to the nation of Myanmar today - to what used to be called Burma - and if you went to the Karen people and asked for a Bible in their language, it would have in the front "translated by Adonirum Judson."

In 1812 Adonirum and Nancy Judson went to Burma to translate the Bible. They suffered terribly from tropical diseases. Judson buried two of his children and his wife in Burma. It was six years before he saw his first convert. He was imprisoned in chains and hung upside down for 18 months. He continued his translation work, even while been hung upside down. He remarried and his second wife and several of their children also died in Burma. After 35 years of ministry with scarcely a break, he had led 10 people to Christ. He died of tuberculosis.

When you point to the name Adonirum Judson in a Burmese Bible today, the Burmese Christians will tell you with tears in their eyes that this man is the father of the church in Myanmar. Today there are more than 6 million believers in Myanmar, all because one man persevered in faith.

Heroes of faith aren't made overnight. They are ordinary people like us, who every day make small choices to trust God. Those small choices of faith, total up to a big faith, from which God chooses his heroes. Why not set as a goal for 2009 to be the year when you make decisions to exercise faith?

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