**Reflections 10-16 August – Keep going in faith**

**Bible study on Hebrews 11: 1-3,8-16**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

*Based on Psalm 33*

Lord, our souls wait for you,
our hearts are glad in you.
When we trust in your holy name,
let your love be upon us anew,
as we hope in you
and worship you this day.
**Amen.**

**Read the passage**

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.*

Hebrews 11:1-3,8-16

**Faith in Action**

**11**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.

**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[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%2011&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30184b)] 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.

**Explore and respond to the text**

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once, or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

**Bible notes**

Throughout the letter to the Hebrews, the writer encourages the audience to keep their faith alive. Like many early Christians, they expected Jesus to return soon. The long wait for his arrival left them losing energy and commitment – this has been described as ‘spiritual torpor’. Just before this passage, the writer has reminded them that faith brings life and salvation. So, what is faith? In verse 1, the writer links faith to assurance (v.1), using the word hypostasis, which implies emotional certainty, and to conviction (the translation of the Greek word, elenchos). Faith relates to two core aspects of human understanding. He then goes on to tell stories of Israel’s history, beginning from creation itself. The world is God’s work, and the stories of chosen individuals follow from this.

Though this passage tells many stories, today’s reading focuses on Abraham, who is also an example of faith for Paul (Galatians 3:6). God promised him a home and descendants (Genesis 12:1-2), and his trust in God led him to follow God’s call, leave his home and become a nomad. He and Sarah had no child and no home for many years, but their commitment to God’s promise was unwavering. The writer relates God’s promise of home to the end-time expectation of the city of God (Revelation 21:2f), which was core to the hopes of the early Christians if not exactly what Genesis implies.

In telling these stories, the writer highlights how the believers’ hopes remained unfulfilled, for they lived in expectation of God’s promises but did not see their fulfilment in Christ. Though they were still on the journey, they did not give up or consider returning to their earlier lives, but continued onwards, faithfully trusting God’s promise that there would be a home for them in God’s country. The stories carry clear implications for the audience of this letter – weary Christians whose faith was dwindling even though they had already met the risen Christ in the power of the Spirit.

 **Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

Hebrews was written for people who were in danger of starting to lose interest in Jesus. Possibly some were becoming disillusioned with faith because of personal issues. Most of the previous chapters deliberately remind people of how wonderful Jesus is – in particular, that he is the real high priest (Hebrews 4:14-16). Chapter 11 is an encouragement to keep on going in faith. Abraham and Sarah are held up as exemplars of people who kept going in faith when the odds seemed to be stacked against them. This week would be a good opportunity to be honest about the struggles we experience to keep on going in faith.

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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**Questions**

* Think of a time when you felt like giving up – what helped you to keep going?
* What are you still trusting God for?
* How is your journey of faith going? Are you focused on the destination?

 **A prayer to end the Bible study**

As you go, may the God of Abraham and Sarah go with you.
May you be ready to meet Jesus whenever he comes to you,
and may you know yourself held within the love of God,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
**Amen.**