



God of Long Journeys

Scripture & Prayer
Reflections on Faith
Hebrews 11:1 – 12: 3

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First: Starless Night



Scripture

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

– Hebrews 11:1-3 (NRSV)

Prayer

*Creator God,
You who spoke the galaxies that hang in the night sky,
instill in us the capacity to hope and to live into our hopes—
to remain open to assurance
in the midst of ambiguity and disruption.*

*Allow us to rest in trust that you hold
our unseen futures in your hands,
and that you speak the ongoing-ness of our journeys
in the same way you spoke their beginnings.*

*When we are feeling our way through starless nights,
we know that your light is within us and around us,
and will reveal itself with the certain-coming dawn.*

*Convince us that you are present to us
in the middle of our uncertainties,
and assure us of your kindness
when we can't muster hope.
-Amen*

Second: Help Our Un-Belonging

Scripture

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's. Through this he received approval as righteous, God himself giving approval to his gifts; he died, but through his faith he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken so that he did not experience death; and "he was not found, because God had taken him." For it was attested before he was taken away that "he had pleased God." And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. By faith Noah, warned by God about events as yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark to save his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith.

- Hebrews 11:4-7(NRSV)



Prayer

*Living God,
You who measures our motives,
Who bears us beyond death,
and who rouses us to redemptive action in the world;*

Grant the gift of faith.

*Let our knowing of you transcend knowledge—
opening into a way of being
deeply welcoming of your dwelling presence
with and within us.*

*Expectant of eternity, may we find you pleased.
Inspire in us fidelity and deepest allegiance to you.*

*Teach us to live in the tension between courage and obedience—
boldness and surrender.*

We believe. Help our unbelief.

We belong to you. Help our un-belonging.

Let our belief and our belonging be received as righteousness.

Make us yours: heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Grant the gift of faith.

-Amen

Third: Venture, Adventure, Misadventure



Scripture

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, “as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”

– Hebrews 11:8-12 (NRSV)

Prayer

*God of Sarai and Abram,
spark in me—in us—a faith like theirs,
a faith with a listening posture.
Beckon me—us—to hear,
to attend to your invitation
and to act.
Call to me—to us—to set out,
to respond to your whisper
and to embark on divinely-initiated ventures.
Steady me—steady us—to remain in those ventures,
even as things go awry, and venture becomes adventure,
then mis-adventure.
Let your promise resound to me—to us—
through generations, as co-heirs and co-adventurers
with Sarai, and Abram, with Rebecca and Isaac.
Keep my eyes—our eyes—always forward,
even on those days
when we are as good as dead.
By all of this, grant me—grant us—mature names,
Sarahs and Abrahams, growing us by faith
into that which you have envisioned
from that first beckoning.
-Amen*

Fourth: Like Magnet Draws Iron

Scripture

All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

– Hebrews 11:13-16 (NRSV)



Prayer

*God of Beyond,
Your promises echo from over the hills,
calling us to a place we cannot now go;
Yet we feel them drawing us forward,
like magnet draws iron.*

*No bus can transport us there,
and no jet can fly us over the crests of those mountains;
Yet, somehow we know we have a home
where fire warms hearth and all is right and good.*

*Here we receive those promises in part;
We know warmth and goodness;
And we know chill and cruelty:
Unfulfilled hope—desires that never see earthly light.*

*Grant us the nobility of faith:
vision that transcends the barrier;
And that fixes our eyes
beyond the timeline of human lifespan.*

*May we glimpse the homeland city
you have prepared as gift
for those who, by faith, are yours.
-Amen*

Fifth: After the Freeze

Scripture

By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom he had been told, "It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you." He considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead—and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. By faith Isaac invoked blessings for the future on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, "bowing in worship over the top of his staff." By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions about his burial.

- Hebrews 11:17-22 (NRSV)

Prayer

*God who tests faith,
How are we to bring our Isaac-offerings to you?
You have granted us seeds of promise-fulfillment;
Tiny spores of hope.
Where can we find courage to bury them in dark earth?
They are all we have.*

*Yet after the freeze, delicate sprouts break hard ground.
Seeds of promise raise stems and open leaves,
Then our gardens are bursting with fruit.*

*God who raises the dead,
May we become wizened with age,
Bowing in worship over the tops of our staffs,
Speaking forth generations of faithful progeny:
Ours and yours.
-Amen*



Sixth: Vapor on Breath

Scripture

By faith Moses was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, unafraid of the king's anger; for he persevered as though 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.

- Hebrews 11:23-28 (NRSV)



Prayer

*God of the commonplace,
May we be moved by the splendor of daily things:
The beauty of children,
Loyalty, family, and love*

*May the brilliance of the hidden distract us entirely
From magnificent pursuits
Like luxury, fame, and wealth*

*May fear vanish as vapor on breath
In light of your vision
Future drawing us forth*

*Even terror of loss or dread obscurity
May it flee as we set out
Refusing to sell out
On holy journeys to the ordinary.
-Amen*

Seventh: Newborn at Mother's Breast

Scripture

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.

– Hebrews 11:29-31 (NRSV)



Prayer

*Inspiration of Rahab and Joshua,
May our loyalty to you motivate in us bold courage;
Not for our own feats of power,
But to believe with others for yours.
We confess that our lack of trust makes us timid,
And our timidity is catching.*

*May we cling to you as a newborn at her mother's breast,
In wavering confidence we seek other streams,
Yet you are the only source of true nurturance.*

*You are God of the unlikely
Your rescuing heart beyond imagining*

*We muster the nerve to turn to you in need
Hoping that perhaps
You might respond in power
On our behalf.
-Amen*

Eighth: Faith's Tenacity



Scripture

And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

- Hebrews 11:32-38 (NRSV)

Prayer

*God of Long Journeys,
Grant us faith's courage to take first steps;
Not knowing whether we will lead armies or be tortured;
Rule courtrooms or be mocked and flogged.*

*Grant us faith's perspective to stay on the path;
Whether promise fulfilled or stalled out in poverty;
Daring escape or imprisoned in cells.*

It matters not if we are valiant heroes or forgotten in exile:

*Grant us faith's tenacity to press on;
Holding your vision in our hearts;
and seeing it through;
In honor of those—becoming those—
of whom the world is not worthy.
-Amen*

Ninth: Starting Blocks

Scripture

Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

- Hebrews 11:39 - 12:2 (NRSV)

Prayer

*God of the Race,
So many have pressed feet into starting blocks before us;
Awaiting their turn to run;
Then bore batons for their piece in the great relay.
Now we feel the wood in our grasp;
And run with hearts engaged.
We have shed our pounds, and found our shoes,
Training for fives and tens and halves;
Bleachers full around us with faith's grand athletes
Cheering us on and calling us forth
Fix our eyes, we pray, on Jesus
The one who laid out the course of faith
And, for the joy set before him, broke the finish-line tape,
Enduring cross, disregarding shame.
Grant us endurance,
Though our legs pound, our muscles cry out,
and we pour off sweat,
To finish the race as he did.
-Amen*



Tenth: Course Nails

Scripture

Consider him who endured such hostility
against himself from sinners, so that you may
not grow weary or lose heart.

- Hebrews 12:3 (NRSV)



Prayer

*Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
We set our minds to contemplate...
...How your Son, without complaint or protest,
Walked a long rough trail
Up the side of a hill
Carrying heavy wooden crossbeam
Punished to the brink of death
Having received course nails into flesh*

*...How your Lamb, without struggle for freedom
Allowed himself to be hoisted
On a rough-hewn pole
Thirst unquenched by water or wine
Abandoned by God and Human, exposed
Victim in the Passover drama*

*...How your Child, without malice or hate
Suspended above people and earth
Spoke words of startling grace:*

"Father, forgive, they know not what they do"

"Today, you will join me in paradise"

"Into your hands I commend my spirit"

"It is finished."

May we not grow weary or lose heart.

-Amen