

Sermon Series: Introduction to this years theme - Extraordinary God + Ordinary People = Transformed Lives

Sermon Title: Going Through The Motions by Faith

Sermon Text: Hebrews 11:1 - 12:2

Sermon Presenter: Pastor Larry

Full Sermon Notes

“Such an awesome God, So mighty, so Holy, so Wonderful, Such an awesome God
So selfless, so generous, so faithful You are”

I just don't think there could be a better song to introduce our theme for the coming year - Extraordinary God + Ordinary People = Transformed lives! Amen? Amen! God is such an awesome God, so extraordinary and yet so selfless, so generous and so faithful! If we are willing to let Him work in our lives, He will do extraordinary things, and if you think that you being just an average guy or gal is a problem, it's not! God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things. And don't think ordinary people aren't important to God! We are! Because to God we are all extraordinary people, made in His very image with a unique purpose in life, and created to have fellowship with Almighty God! Let's pray and ask God to begin teaching us today how an extraordinary God + Ordinary people = Transformed Lives! Pray!

The title of today's message is “Going Through the Motions by Faith!” What in the world does that mean? Most of the time we think of the phrase “Going through the motions” as a negative statement. We usually take it to mean simply going through the motions without purpose or meaning or may even think of it as being hypocritical because of a lack of proper motivation. And to be sure there are people who just go through the motions in religion just to put on a show or make others think they're something they are not. They are actors pretending. However, most of us would say, “I'm not trying to be hypocritical, I know I'm not perfect, but I want to live for God! I don't want to just go through the motions as a Christian, I want to feel the emotion, the passion and the excitement of living out God's perfect will and plan for my life!” That's not a bad thing or a bad desire, but there's a truth we must come to understand: Even when we don't feel the feelings, we must continue to do what we know to be right, and true, and Godly, and good! It's like the song we sing sometimes called Way Maker. “Even when I don't see it You're working, even when I don't feel it You're working, You never stop! You never stop working!” This is what faith is all about! So sometimes we need to go through the motions by faith, believing God is still working even when we can't see it, feel it, or perceive it! Going through the motions by faith is what the ancient men and women of faith in the Bible did! This year, 2022, we will study the lives of these great men and women of God, who were in many ways just ordinary people who placed their faith and trust in an extraordinary God and their lives were transformed. As we read portions of Hebrews Chapter 11 & 12 we will discover elements of faith, results of faith, and secrets of faith that sustained God's people as they went through the motions of living for God by faith!

1. Faith Elements

Elements of Faith - Confidence/Substance/Assurance

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

Hebrews 11:2 This is what the ancients were commended for.

Some translations actually say...

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen!”

The Broadman Commentary says...

“For a clue to the meaning of the substance of faith, we may return to a passage in which Christ is called the character of God’s own substance or “hypostasis” (1:3). Could we then go so far as to say, “If you want to see what faith is, look at Christ”? It is Christ who is the object, who calls forth our faith; and it is Christ who is the subject, who gives substance to our faith. It is Christ who pulls our future hope into the present, and it is Christ who will bring the realization of our hope when he comes again. He is the “pioneer and perfecter” of our faith (12:2). He is the Alpha and Omega of the Apocalypse.”

Trentham, C. A. (1972). Hebrews. In C. J. Allen (Ed.), Hebrews–Revelation (p. 78). Broadman Press.

So the fact that Jesus is both the subject and the object of our faith, brings us confidence and becomes the very substance of what our faith is made of!

Elements of Faith - Understanding/Sight

Hebrews 11:3 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.

The very first few verses of the Book of Hebrews says this...

Hebrews 1:1 In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways,

Hebrews 1:2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.

Hebrews 1:3 The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

So faith helps us to understand and see both the physical realm as well as the spiritual realm of life! Faith becomes sight! Faith certainly starts out with limited sight, but its vision gets better and better with time.

Elements of Faith - Righteousness/Testimony

Hebrews 11:4 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.

Abel, by faith, followed God's instructions for his offering. Cain did not. Cain's offering was rejected. God knew his heart. Cain was jealous and took his brother's life. And while it was a tragedy that Able didn't get to live a long life in this world, the greater tragedy was what Cain had to live with in this life. Cain ended up with a horrible reputation, but Abel ended up with a glorious testimony. And here's the lesson for us: By faith we can end up with a testimony regardless of our reputation or past because of what Jesus has done for us! Paul put it this way in Philippians 3...

Philippians 3:8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ

Philippians 3:9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

Elements of Faith - Life (Temporal and Eternal)

Hebrews 11:5 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.

I love the way the Old Testament states this...

Genesis 5:24 Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

Enoch's faith made such a difference in his life here on earth and God was so pleased with him that He just took him on to heaven with having to go through the throes of physical death. So maybe that won't happen to you and me, but let me put it to you this way:

Living by faith in this world will not take away all of your troubles and hardships, but it sure can help you escape the throes and consequences of wickedness.

Romans 6:4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Elements of Faith - Belief/Rewards

Hebrews 11:6 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.

It's called faith, not proof, but it's not blind faith! We have reasons to believe! Paul the Apostle knew what it was like to be discouraged and in despair and he remembered how the Psalmist, King David, felt the same things and yet believed. Paul quotes the Psalmist...

2 Corinthians 4:13 It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak,

2 Corinthians 4:14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself.

2 Corinthians 4:15 All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

2 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

Talk about rewards for faith! An eternal glory that far outweighs our light and momentary troubles. Wait a minute. Light? Light because Jesus helps us carry our burdens. He is our strength! And they are momentary, we won't be taking our troubles here on earth with us to heaven. Paul puts it this way in the next verse...

2 Corinthians 4:18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

And seven verses later, Paul says...

2 Corinthians 5:7 For we live by faith, not by sight.

Elements of Faith - Trust/Obedience

Hebrews 11:7 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.

Hebrews 11:8 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.

Hebrews 11:9 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.

Hebrews 11:10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Talk about trust! Noah builds a boat in the middle of the desert, and is mocked and laughed at by everyone. They stopped laughing when it wouldn't stop raining! And talk about obedience. Check this out...

Genesis 12:1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

Now that's walking by faith! And for the planners out there, that would not be an easy task. Planning is not wrong, but I submit to you that planning to trust and obey God and His plan as He reveals it to you is a plan. My friend Dennis Ritchie wrote an amazing blog this week on planning. He made this very true statement...

"God placed us in today and doesn't reveal all of His plans. That would exceed my limited abilities."

<https://www.theartofstanding.com/my-10-point-plan-for-an-unimaginable-2022/>

Sometimes it's just best to keep things simple. If we would just live the great commandments, "love the Lord your God with all your heart, love your neighbor as yourself" and the great commission, "make disciples!" God's overall plan hasn't changed. The same purpose and mission are still there. Bloom where you're planted and remember that the joy is in the journey, not just the destination.

Elements of Faith - Impossible

Hebrews 11:11 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.

Hebrews 11:12 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.

Sarah was 90 years old and Abraham was around 100. In our lives things may look impossible and our circumstances may seem insurmountable, but not with God! Remember Jesus said...

Matthew 19:26 ... with God all things are possible."

Elements of Faith - Commitment

Hebrews 11:13 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.

Hebrews 11:14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.

Hebrews 11:15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.

Hebrews 11:16 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.

They could have turned back to their old life! They could have given up because of the troubles. But the truth is that life is tough and hard regardless of where you are. When I was a pastor in Nashville, TN. I had a friend who was in a secular rock band. They fronted the rock band Motley Crue and my friend invited me to come hear their part of the show. I know, don't judge. I was actually called to go backstage to see my friend after the first couple of Motley Crue songs. But before that, here's what happened. After my friend's band had finished playing, there was an intermission. I had a t-shirt on that had an old black and white painting of Jesus being nailed to the cross. The caption said, "Ultimate Rescue." This girl in the row in front of me asked me what was up with the t-shirt. I don't remember exactly what I said, but she responded, "Wow, a pastor at a Motley Crue concert, that's crazy!" I told her why I was there and that Jesus loved her! She told me she had tried the "God thing once, but it was just too hard!" I said to her, "So since you gave up on God, life's been all good, easy, and no problems?" She said, "Oh no, life's still so hard, I've got a lot on me." I told her, "Life is hard for all of us, but I'd rather live life hard for God and know there's purpose and meaning in this life and eternal life after this one ends, than to live life hard with no hope!" She said, "Whoa, I've never thought about it that way!" I encouraged her to give God another try! Here's the point, when you decide to follow Jesus, Satan's not going to go easy on you. He knows he's lost your soul for good, so the only thing he can hope to do is get you to give up your commitment to live for Jesus so he can steal your witness to others and steal your joy and fellowship with The Lord. He can't take away your child of God status, but he'll try to destroy your effectiveness to make a difference in this world. However, if we exercise the elements of faith there will be...

2. Faith Results

The writer then spends the next 16 verses listing many others who lived by faith and trusted their lives into the hands of God and there are many more elements of faith found in these verses. Many of these people will be featured in our sermons this year. Let's go to verse 32 and following as our writer mentions even more people and states some of the extraordinary things God did through these ordinary people and how their faith in God Almighty transformed their lives and the lives of many others.

A. Victory in this life!

Listen...

Hebrews 11:32 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,
Hebrews 11:33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions,

Hebrews 11:34 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.

Hebrews 11:35 Women received back their dead, raised to life again...

So some saw God work in miraculous ways and they experienced victory in this life! Our extraordinary God works in and through ordinary people like you and me to do extraordinary things in our lives and others when we place our faith and trust in Him and allow Him to work. This year we're going to look back at how God worked powerfully in the lives of people in the stories of the Bible, but we are also going to look at how God is in fact doing amazing things in the lives of people still today! We will at times hear testimonies from people whose lives have been transformed by God, through the Good news of Jesus Christ, His life, His death, His resurrection and His continued work in our lives by way of His Holy Spirit! Faith brings victory not only in this life but...

B. Victory in eternity!

We must remember that God not only works in our times of triumph and victory, but also in our times of struggle, difficulties, and even seeming defeat. God's purposes will be achieved! God can make good come from bad! God can take a mess and make a masterpiece! God can turn a tragedy into a triumph! God can even use death in this life to bring eternal life to others! Sometimes, what the world may see as defeat, is in fact the ultimate victory for a follower of Jesus! I heard someone say. "if God brings you to it He'll bring you through it!" And let me say this: if for some reason He chooses to call you home, then your work is finished on this earth and you have won the ultimate battle and you've overcome death and the grave through your faith in Jesus. He brought you through it and got you safely to your eternal destination, to live in glory in the very presence of your Lord and Savior! Our writer speaks of this...

Hebrews 11:35 ... There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection..

Hebrews 11:36 Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.

Hebrews 11:37 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—

Hebrews 11:38 the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.

Hebrews 11:39 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised,

Hebrews 11:40 since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

The writer here is alluding to the fact that these Old Testament standouts did not get to live to see the final fulfillment of the promises concerning the Savior of Israel, the Messiah, the Lamb of God! However, they saw God work miracles to keep the line of David secure so the Messiah,

of the lineage of David, would fulfill the prophecies! Their faith that God had not abandoned them and would someday fulfill the ancient prophecies was strong! They looked forward in faith to the coming of the promised Messiah! We look back in faith on the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies in Jesus!

You might say the people the writer of Hebrews is writing about went through the motions of exercising their faith, believing that God would keep His promises even when they couldn't see it with their eyes! Going through the motions is what we sometimes have to do! When we can't see! When we can't feel/when we can't hear/when we can't touch/ when we don't understand/ when we suffer! By faith we trust when we can't know. Going through the motions is trusting that God will keep His promises, bring the provision, bring the victory and even allow us to once again experience the feelings, the passion, the emotions! We don't rely on feelings, but it's not wrong to ask God to restore them! The Psalmist did this...

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Psalm 51:11 Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Psalm 51:12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Until He does, pray for vision, pray that God will defeat the enemy, guide your way, give you strength, and peace! Ask God to do these things not because your faith is so huge, but because of your faithfulness to exercise your mustard seed of faith in a great big God and to go through the motions even when you're not feeling it, trusting God with the outcomes! That's not being hypocritical, that's being honest and trusting and walking by faith and not by sight!

As you go through the motions you begin to remember, you begin to realize, you begin to experience the love of God, the work of God, the power of God to do extraordinary things with ordinary people who don't have the power or the strength or the ability on their own to make it, but who humbly and with determination decide, regardless of feelings, to walk by faith and trust God with the outcome! The ordinary can become extraordinary when you take the step of faith! It won't be easy street and may even be difficult, there will be hardships, but you will prevail! And here's an awesome thing that I've experienced: as I walk by faith and not by feelings the feelings begin to return, and I'm amazed to see what God has done! You see, just going through the motions is not hypocritical if you are doing your best and your motives are right regardless of how you feel!

Okay you've got to understand something...there are Sundays when I'm not feeling it! I'm spent emotionally and even though I've prepared long and hard, the feelings are just not there! In those times I have to go by faith and not by feelings! I have to trust that God will be faithful to His Word and not let His Word return void! It is those days that I struggle the most and second guess myself and even feel like a failure, but here's an amazing thing...it's many times on those Sunday's where I get the most texts or calls or an email telling me that God's Message through me that Sunday touched and even changed someone's life! It's like God is reminding me that it's not by my might or power but by His Spirit that ministry happens in my life! In other words it's not based on how good I am, or how emotionally up I feel that brings God's anointing!! Don't get me

wrong, I love mountain top experiences! I love the times I feel like Moses and I've been in the very presence of God and my countenance reflects that, however, I've got to trust that God is with me in the valleys every bit as much as He is with me on the mountain tops! Because He said "I will never leave you or forsake you!" How do we know He will keep His promises?

Hebrews 10:19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,

Hebrews 10:20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,

Hebrews 10:21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

Hebrews 10:22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Hebrews 10:23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

You see, it's not my power, my strength or my goodness that changes the hearts and lives of people, it's God's faithfulness, it's His power, it is His Holy Spirit, using a broken vessel, yet a willing vessel! When the Bible says we walk by faith and not by sight, for those of us who are more emotionally driven, this can be translated "we walk by faith and not by feelings!!! Feelings aren't bad, but I can't trust my feelings. I must trust God's faithfulness, His Word, His promises! The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah understood...

Lamentations 3:17 I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is.

Lamentations 3:18 So I say, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the LORD."

Lamentations 3:19 I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall.

Lamentations 3:20 I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.

Lamentations 3:21 Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:

Lamentations 3:22 Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.

Lamentations 3:23 They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:24 I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

Lamentations 3:25 The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him;

Lamentations 3:26 it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.

And the writer of Hebrews speaks a similar and powerful refrain...

Hebrews 10:35 So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.

Hebrews 10:36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Walking by faith is a matter of trust! Faith is believing God can, Trust is believing God will! Faith is knowing God has the power, trust is allowing God to use that power in your life! Faith is understanding God is the One who can change your life, Trust is giving God the keys to your heart and life! Faith is a belief - trust is an action! Faith becomes the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen as we exercise our faith by trusting God with our

actions, walking by faith, and not just having faith! In other words, not just believing God can, but trusting that God will!

Okay, so how will all of this help me practically in my life to go through the motions by faith and get to a place where I'm not just faithfully going through the motions but once again feeling the joy? We find this out in the first two verses of Hebrews chapter 12.

Faith Secrets

1. Remember the Examples

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses...

As we've seen this morning, the writer of Hebrews reminds us of the awesome examples we have in our Bibles! These otherwise ordinary people have given testimony to their faith and the impact their extraordinary God had in transforming their lives and the lives of those around them.

2. Get Rid of Distractions

Hebrews 12:1 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...

Sin is a distraction! It will hinder you and entangle you. I'm pretty sure God has already revealed to you what your distractions are! You know what to do!

3. Persevere even when your not feeling it

Hebrews 12:1 ... And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,

We are told that the race is marked out for us! In other words, you know what to do! You know the principles you are to follow. Do the Christ-like thing even when you're not feeling it and the feelings will follow. Remember, it's okay to ask God to bring back the joy!

4. Focus on Jesus

Hebrews 12:2 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.

When we fix our eyes on Jesus are able to see our extraordinary God taking on human flesh in order to do the most extraordinary thing God has ever done for ordinary people. Jesus allowed Himself to be crucified on the cross, taking our sin and shame, defeating death and the grave and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God! When we realize and accept that our

salvation, and the ability to have a relationship with God was the joy set before Jesus that caused Him to be willing to endure the cross, our lives will be transformed! Let's pray!