

January 8 –

We've begun a New Year—how many New Year's resolutions have you made this year? Any? If you did make resolutions, how many have you abandoned already? This jar is evidence of one of my 2016 resolutions—I started off strong: one blessing each day. And then....you know how it works, you skip a day, then a couple of days, then a week. And soon whatever you resolved to do is...forgotten. That's often how New Year's resolutions work, isn't it.

If I were to make a New Year's resolution this year, it probably would have something to do with being the best possible pastor I can be. January 1, we—you and I—began a slightly different relationship than we've had for the past 11 months. Last week I used the word "Scary." I meant this undertaking, this New Year, this new relationship is scary for me---even pastors, even people in leadership can have anxious times. Can I be the kind of pastor you need and want?

In the midst of thinking about this new relationship, I was reminded of Hebrews 11, a portion of which we just read. Hebrews 11 is known as the faith chapter—for obvious reasons, it is about those who faithfully followed God, wherever God might lead them.

From the stories included in Hebrews 11, we can learn what we need to do to follow God. We can make resolutions for this New Year, resolutions about our relationship with God.

So let's take a look at Hebrews 11:1-16

The chapter begins by telling us what faith is, by giving us a definition of faith.

Hebrews 11:1

Faith is being sure (assurance) of what we hope for, being certain of what we do not see.

Hope is not just wishful thinking; assurance, being sure of, certainty

We can be sure of God's presence with us, we can be certain that God will do what God has promised. That's the faith with which we are to live our lives We have evidence of this....

Hebrews 11:4 By faith....

Abel brought a more presentable sacrifice than his brother Cain Why was one sacrifice—a lamb brought by the shepherd—better than another—first fruits such as grain brought by the farmer? Perhaps Abel brought the very best he had and Cain was less careful in choosing what to offer. Regardless, Cain was envious, jealous of his brother—sibling rivalry. Cain killed Abel. We also read, "Although he died because of his faith, he is still speaking to us" Abel left a legacy—we still the story of Abel and Cain, a story of bringing to God the very best we have, the very best we are.

Are we offering our very best to God as we minister together at FBC?

What legacy do you want to leave? Do we as a congregation want to leave

147 years of ministry (as of February) – another several years?

Resolution:

To worship God with the very best I have to offer

Resolution:

To leave a legacy for those who follow

Hebrews 11:5-6 By faith....

Enoch did not see death but was taken up into heaven Scripture tells us that Enoch walked with God. Enoch chose to be seek God in all that he did. Remember the WWJD—What Would Jesus Do? That could have been a question Enoch asked himself frequently: What Would God Do? And then Enoch did what God would do. Enoch's life was a journey with God, with each step bringing Enoch closer to God. Death, for Enoch, was simply the final step in the journey, moving fully into the presence of God.

Do we live each day in God's presence, asking God to be with us and to guide us?

Margaret took the final step of her journey on Saturday and moved fully into the presence of God.

Resolution:

To walk with God, every moment of each day

Hebrews 11:7 By faith....

Noah accepted God's message and built an ark

Think of the commitment Noah made in agreeing to build an ark. In the middle of a desert area, Noah was building something that would float on water. And what Noah built wasn't just a canoe or even a small ship; Noah built a very large ark. And what Noah built took years to build. By faith, Noah lived with ridicule as he responded to God's warnings of things yet to come. Noah believed and obeyed.

William Barclay, in his commentary on Hebrews, reminds us:

The choice comes to every (person), either to listen to, or to disregard the message of God.

Do we choose to listen for what God may be telling us to do? And, hearing God, do we choose to obey God's instructions?

Resolution:

To listen and then to be obedient to God's call

Hebrews 11:8-10 By faith....

Abraham went out from Haran, not knowing where God was leading. Abraham listened to God's call and was obedient. He gathered his family, his flocks and all his possessions and set out on a journey. Abraham had to be ready for an adventure.

Are we ready for the adventure God offers us?

Maybe we think God's adventure is a bit scary, a bit risky.

Barclay also comments, "If faith does not involve risk, it isn't faith. If faith can see every step of the way, it isn't faith."

By faith Abraham went out, not knowing where he was going

Resolution:

To trust God to lead us in the ministry to which God calls us

Resolution:

To wait on the Lord

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Hebrews 11:11-12 By faith.....

Though old, Sarah and Abraham had a son, promised by God. At first when they heard the promise, both Abraham and Sarah laughed: Sarah was going to have a son, at her age? Abraham was going to be a father, at his age?

Yet through God, the impossible became possible.

What do we believe is impossible for the ministry of FBC?

If we have faith in God, could the impossible become possible?

Resolution:

To avoid giving age as a reason not to serve

To avoid giving excuses rather than choosing to be obedient

By faith...

What is the ministry, God's ministry, that is seeking you?

What is the ministry, God's ministry, seeking this congregation?

Or another way of saying it, what ministry that God is calling us to do is impossible without faith in God?

Hebrews 11 has given us a number of New Year's Resolutions:

To worship God with the VERY BEST we have to offer

To leave a legacy of faithfulness to those who are to come

To walk with God, every moment of every day

To listen for God's call, to listen to God's instructions and then to be obedient -- Do what God asks you to do

To trust God to lead us to the ministry where we are most needed

To wait on the Lord, during the in-between time – working even as God's call is unfolding, developing

Hebrews 11:13-16 By faith...

These—Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah--did not receive the things promised...They saw them and welcomed them from a distance

What is in the distance—what do you hope for?

(even if that means only after this earthly life)

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What are those things not seen that are better than
anything that could occur to us in this life?

Abel—Enoch—Noah—Abraham and Sarah—Moses—Rahab—
Gideon—Barak—Samson—Jephthah—David—Samuel—the
prophets – all those mentioned in Hebrews 11

Were always strangers, aliens, sojourners

They did not receive God's promise this side of heaven; they
served God, worshiped God, were obedient to God anyway.

I was reminded of a hymn:

This world is not my home I'm just a-passin' through
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore

Perhaps there is one more resolution: to seek the promise God
has made

I will be your God and you will be my people
Exodus, Leviticus, Jeremiah

Ezekiel 36:27—I (the Lord) will give you a new heart
There is ministry seeking us; God is already at work; we just
need to join God

1 Peter 1:23—born again of imperishable seed, through the
living and enduring word of God;

When we have accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord, we are born
of an imperishable seed. How are we to live each day?

1 Peter 1:22—now that you have purified yourselves by obeying
the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one
another deeply, from the heart

Seek first the kingdom of God

Be open to the kingdom of God reaching out to you... and live this
year with the assurance of what you hope for, the certainty of
what you cannot see...that you may live this year in faith..