

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: BUILDING FAITH AT HOME

The Faith-Filled Home

(Hebrews 11)

Study #4

Introduction: Construction is tricky...

Ambitious construction projects are impressive to non-builders like me, but to even the most experienced builders, construction can be tricky.

Consider the contractor who oversees the construction of a home here in San Antonio. He has to organize surveyors and foundation crews, plumbers and electricians, carpenters and bricklayers, paint and sheet rock crews and carpet and tile guys just to build one home.

And that's not all! Building a home is made more complicated and trickier by city and county codes, weather concerns, the shrinking and expanding of our clay soils, and the changing tastes of home buyers.

Still, construction and building are necessary elements in a growing city like ours. So contractors will keep moving ahead with their tricky work.

This morning, for the fourth Sunday in a row, we're going to be thinking about building. But the construction project we are considering is not a high rise or a brick and board home.

What we are seeking to build is more valuable than that. Here at Northwest we envision everyone who is a part of our church building faith in their home.

Here at the beginning, I want to say that if building a home is tricky, building faith in that home is also tricky.

You've heard the phrase, "Building Faith at Home". Have you ever thought about what those words mean?

Here is how I would explain what we mean by "Building Faith at Home."

We mean that we, who have faith in Jesus, want to see our homes be places where faith in Jesus reigns. Whether we are living alone or with others, with roommates or with family, we long to see a robust, biblical faith lived out under our roof. That's the vision. It's a beautiful vision and, yes, a tricky vision.

Building faith at home - God's work

It's tricky because on the one hand, we acknowledge that only God can build faith. You are actually *unable* to build faith in your child's heart. You *can't make* your husband or your wife believe. You can't *force* your roommates to trust in Jesus. We can't *twist the arms* of our friends into believing, either.

Passing on a rich faith is fundamentally different from passing on riches.

If a set of wealthy parents wants to pass on their wealth to their children, there is very little chance that the kids will look that gift horse in the mouth and say, "*Thanks, but no thanks.*"

If, however, a set of parents who are rich in faith offer their children the infinitely more precious gift of faith, the kids just might reject that gift outright.

Placing faith in Jesus is an intensely personal, internal, and spiritual thing and no human can force another to take that faith step. It has to be a transaction between the individual sinner and God.

Building faith at home - YOUR work

However, there is “another hand.” In Scripture we have clear instruction that we are to pass the torch of the faith forward to those following us, both in and out of our homes.

Every time we have a dedication of a child by loving, faith-filled parents, we give voice to our belief that there is something that parents can do that will meaningfully impact the next generation for Christ. We believe that that there is a “faith-building” way that parents are to be with their son or daughter. We further believe that God is often pleased to honor that way by directing the child in the way of faith.

Psalm 78 and lots of other passages in Scripture speak of the importance of passing on a living faith to our children. 2 Timothy 2:2 speaks of doing the same within the broader family of God.

So, we readily admit our responsibility to do what we can to “build faith at home.” Just as readily we admit that we are dependent on God moving in the hearts of those in our homes if faith is to be built.

To the side of the challenge that says, “*God must act or we have no hope*” we pray.

To the side that says, “*We are to pass on the faith; we are to ‘build faith at home’*”, we study Scripture, strategize and plan, and do things that we hope will result in our friends and loved ones embracing and then growing in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.¹

So, what do we do to build faith?

Great question. And of course, there are lots of answers that lots of authors and speakers and pastors have given to answer that question.²

¹ It’s tricky enough to think about building faith at home when we admit that we really aren’t in control of this construction project, but that God is. It gets even trickier when, recognizing that the way of faith is diametrically opposed to the way of works, we ask the ironical question, “*What do we DO to build faith?*”

² Consider [Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions](#) (George Barna) and [Rock-Solid Kids](#) (Larry Fowler) and [Marriage Spirituality](#) (Paul Stevens).

This morning you and I are going to explore the issue of “building faith” - at home and elsewhere - ourselves. And my plan is to spend a few minutes going to the one chapter in the Bible that probably has more to say about the nature of faith than any other.

Hebrews 11

Toward the end of our New Testaments we find the book of Hebrews. Toward the end of the book of Hebrews we find a chapter where the author³ provides dozens of examples of faith-filled living, the closest thing to a definition of faith we find anywhere in Scripture, and a faith-centered statement of how we are to come to God.

And what we find in Hebrews 11, I believe, will greatly help us in the work of building faith in our homes.

To start off with, a definition of faith.

[1] Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Non-faith takes the world as it appears and says, “*This is ALL there is.*” Faith holds that reality consists of what God has promised, even if the promise hasn’t yet been fulfilled.

What we see is certainly reality. Faith says that there is a deeper reality beyond what we see.

Men and women who have walked with God have always been approved by God by their faith, by taking God as His word, by trusting that His promise is more real than what they see.

Abel, the son of Adam and Eve, offered up a better sacrifice than his brother Cain, by faith, and was justified for it.⁴ Enoch was allowed to leave this earth without ever tasting death because of his faith.⁵

³ We don’t know who wrote the letter to the Hebrews.

⁴ He offered that sacrifice in the hope that he would be reckoned righteous - and he was.

⁵ He led a faith-full life and was blessed / rewarded for so pleasing God that he didn’t die.

Faith sees what is - grass, flowers, trees, oceans, mountains, animals, stars, and galaxies - and understands / accepts that while science can increasingly explain more and more of what has been mystery, behind the existence of everything there is, is God. Faith says that it was God who caused matter to spring from non-matter, something to come from nothing.

The Bible tells us about this God who has created everything there is and assures us that we can come to this God. He is a personal God. He is approachable.

The Bible also tells us that there is a certain way to approach Him if we are to approach Him in the way He wants us to approach Him.

First off, when we approach Him rightly, we will come to Him believing that He IS.

Come to God Believing That He IS (Hebrews 11:6a)

[6] And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is...

The writers of the Bible don't so much seek to *prove* the existence of God as they *assume* it. And clearly, not everyone today assumes God's existence.

Coming to Grips with the Existence of God

God? Or Not-God?

Atheism in the culture

Some, in coming to the question to end all questions ("*Is God?*") answer in the negative with atheism. The meaning of the word "atheism" is pretty transparent. If there is any question about it, Webster clarifies.

Atheism: The doctrine or belief that there is no God; disbelief in the existence of a supreme being or beings.

An atheist is someone who holds to the belief that there is no God. And in our culture atheism is riding the crest of a wave of popularity.

Authors Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion*; *The Blind Watchmaker*) and the late Christopher Hitchens (*The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Non-Believer*; *god is Not Great*), have written books seeking to convince their readers that God is not.

Michael Martin and Ricki Monnier edited *The Impossibility of God*, in which various authors offer thirty two "disproofs" of God. Russ Kirk has edited another book titled, *Everything You Know About God is Wrong*.

Atheism, close to home

My own story includes some experience with atheism. I was raised in a family that attended church very regularly. However, the church we attended was not the kind that took the Bible seriously or that talked much about God.

The church culture was more about, "*Do the best you can.*"

Well, like most young people, I had questions about God - and these questions were not being addressed at all in the church setting.

So, as a teenager, I came to the conclusion that if God was not much of a big deal at church, then there must not be much to this whole "God" thing. And I became a professing atheist.

I'm not going to pretend that my atheism was a mature, reasoned, philosophically developed and rationally defensible atheism of the sort espoused by an intellect like Richard Dawkins.

But I did believe that I was alone in the universe and I did believe that there was no God.⁶

⁶ Our hearts cry out for **meaning**. We hunger to find purpose in the grand scheme of things. But transcendent, ultimate meaning and purpose are precisely the things that are denied us if there is no God. Without God, there is no ultimate basis for **morality**. Right and wrong have no transcendent mooring if we are just the product of an accidental combination of molecules in an ultimately impersonal universe. A godless universe mocks **human aspiration**. **Values** like honesty and love have no more significance than treachery and selfishness - if God is not. Without God, Shakespeare's Macbeth had it right -

Every atheist, though, be they a teenager or a Richard Dawkins, has to face the fact that proving atheism is a really steep climb, for the simple reason that it is always difficult to prove a negative.

I might believe that there are no cats covered with pink polka dots and green stripes. But to prove that, I would have to round up ALL the cats there are - and the possibility will always exist that I might have missed the one pink-polka dotted green striped cat out there.

To KNOW that God is not, we would actually have to know everything that can be known (which would make us God... ☺).

The reality is that neither Richard Dawkins, nor you nor anyone else has enough information to say, “*There is no God.*” It is impossible to be certain that God is not out there somewhere beyond the limits of our knowledge.⁷

So, a reasonable discussion of God’s existence will include the possibility that He exists, followed by a careful consideration of evidence to validate (or not) the reasonableness of His existence.⁸

*“Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.” (Macbeth, Act 5, scene 5)*

⁷ A French philosopher and mathematician who lived in the 17th century, Blaise Pascal, tried to convince his unbelieving friends to take the matter of God’s existence seriously. Referred to as “Pascal’s Wager”, the reasoning runs like this: ***If God does not exist and you believe in Him, your life is probably richer for believing in Him; and if He doesn’t exist and you don’t believe in Him, you have lost nothing.

***If, however, God does exist and you believe in Him, you have gained an abundant, joyful life and will have an eternal reward; but if you don’t believe in Him and He is real, you have lost, not only in this life, but in the life to come. Pascal’s Wager has been criticized for urging people to fake belief in God as a way of hedging their bets. But that was not at all what the wager was ever about. Certainly, if there is a God, He would be able to see through such a counterfeit faith. Pascal simply wanted his friends to take the whole matter of God seriously.

⁸ At the same time, while to my way of thinking, atheism is emotionally unsatisfying, *that* is no reason to discard it. There are lots of things in the world that are distasteful, but which are, nonetheless, realities. Paying taxes is unpleasant. So is the presence of cancer, AIDS, and war distressing. But I can’t stick my head

Well, on purpose, God has so designed things that there is no definitive, scientific “proof” of His existence.

However, while there is no proof, there is plenty of evidence. God has left plenty of “bread crumbs” to point to His existence and His fingerprints are there to see for those whose eyes are open.

Bread crumbs leading us to God

God’s power and creativity are seen in the enormity of the universe and His wisdom is seen in its intricate design.

His fingerprints are all over the hearts of every person, too, in that we discern meaning and purpose. The Bible says that God has [*Ecclesiastes 3:11*] *set eternity in [our] hearts*. That is, there is awareness that there is something beyond what we can hear, see, taste, smell and touch. There is someone who is behind what is out there.

Again, God has left evidence, but He hasn’t offered proof. And that is because He values our faith. If we would come to Him in the way that He wants us to come to Him we will come to Him believing that He is.

And believing that He is will mean that we will acknowledge Him and worship Him and speak of Him throughout our days.

Practicing the Existence of God

Talking about God in your home

As much as it depends on you, make it your aim to create a culture in your home where it is never out of place to say, “God”.

Acknowledge Him. Maybe that starts today when you return to your home from church and engage your family with heartfelt God-talk.

in the sand and disbelieve them just because I don’t like them. Depending on your perspective, atheism may or may not be distressing. But atheism’s emotional impact does not mean that we should dismiss it or embrace it. Reality is what reality is. Even if everyone believed in God, He might NOT really exist. And if everyone was an atheist, He might still exist. Beliefs don’t determine reality.

If that's not been the "norm" in your home to this point, it is possible that it will feel like jumping off a cliff when you say "God" while the game is on or while everybody is texting.

But if the ultimate is true and God IS, go ahead and say it out loud.

Tell your parents what you're thinking about God. Tell your husband or your wife your God thoughts. Ask your kids questions that probe their minds when it comes to faith.

Building faith at home will mean that it is increasingly the norm to speak of God and His ways with your family, with your roommates, and with friends who stop by.

Talking to God in your home

And then, as much as it depends on you, do all that you can to create a culture where it never seems odd or out of place to stop and pray.

If you're living alone, let your home be a sanctuary where you and Jesus talk regularly. Try making it a practice to greet the Lord as you walk into your home. Set aside time for you and Him to meet.

If you've got others living with you in your home try asking them if there is something you can pray for them about. Or if they admit that their day has been less than stellar, ask them if you could pray for them NOW.

Put aside fear and pray. Work hard to make prayer a common language in your home.

If you would build faith at home I can hardly think of better ways to nurture that faith than to talk about God "***when you rise up and when you lie down***" (Deuteronomy 6) and to talk with Him at the drop of a hat.

We do our part of our part to "build faith at home" when we acknowledge and worship and talk about God with those with whom we live.

But, the author of the book of Hebrews says that in addition to coming to God believing that He is, there is another aspect of coming to God that must be in place if we are going to come to Him in the way that pleases Him.

Listen.

Come to God Believing that He is a Rewarder

[6] And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

If we would pass along a FAITH worthy of being passed along we will pass along a faith that is thoroughly biblical.

Well, the Bible says that true faith holds God to be a certain kind of God and that our "getting" that He is that kind of a God is what pleases Him. (I submit today, as well, that such a faith nurtures a faith response in those we love.)

So, what kind of a God is God? He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. He IS *and* He is a REWARDER and His rewarding ways are clearly seen in Hebrews, chapter 11.

Time does not permit us look in-depth at all the heroes and heroines of Hebrews 11, but we do have time to glance at a Hebrews 11 "sampler" to show that those who pleased God by their faith had the kind of faith that looked to God for reward.

We've seen that Abel was rewarded (with righteousness - v. 4) and that Enoch was rewarded (by being taken to heaven without death - v. 5).

Now, let's consider Noah.

Noah Built an Ark (v. 7)

[7] By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Noah obeyed God and God called that obedience “faith.”

Noah built a huge floating vessel at the command of God that would save him and his family from a coming flood of water. Noah believed that there was **reward** in obeying God - the reward of surviving the flood - and that FAITH pleased God.

Next, we see Abraham.

Abraham Pulled Up Stakes (vv. 8-10)

[8] By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. [9] By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; [10] for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Abraham obeyed God’s command to go to the land of Canaan, a land he had never seen. He left a stable home, riches, and extended family to go to Canaan.

He went at the command of God to receive an inheritance, specifically, the land + the promise of a nation that would come from his offspring. God saw his obedience to travel a long distance to an unknown land in order to receive a **reward** as “FAITH”. That faith pleased God.

Other faith stories follow.

- When God told Sarah that she would have a son, she believed that she would be **rewarded** with a son. (v. 11)⁹
- When God told Abraham to offer up his son, Isaac, as a burnt offering on Mount Moriah, he obeyed, believing that God would **reward** him with a resurrection if he went through with the sacrifice. (vv. 17-19)
- Isaac blessed his second-born son, Jacob, first, not Esau his first born, because he believed God would **reward** this order of blessing, seeing that he himself had also been blessed before his older brother, Ishmael. (v. 20)

⁹ These (Noah, Abraham, Sarah) all died without receiving the promises in full, but they obeyed, believing that God was going to fulfill His promise to them.

- Jacob blessed his own sons as he was dying, in confidence that God would **reward** him with his family’s future prosperity. (v. 21)
- Joseph commanded that his bones be carried back from Egypt to Canaan, confident that God would **reward** his family with a return to the Promised Land. (v. 22)

These short stories are followed by comments about Moses.

Moses was born a Hebrew, but was raised in Pharaoh’s court, thanks to his parent’s courageous act of putting him in a reed basket in the Nile River. But Moses never forgot who he was.

Moses Refused Egypt’s Riches (vv. 24-26)

[24] By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, [25] choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, [26] considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.

Moses’ refusal to enjoy the riches of being raised in the royal family was surely sacrificial and it is commendable. But notice that he denied himself the present delights of the treasures of Egypt BECAUSE he was looking for the **reward** that God would give him later.

And why did the Israelites circle the city of Jericho for seven days? Because they believed that obeying God would bring them the **reward** of victory over Jericho. (v. 30)

And why did Rahab the harlot welcome the men who had come to Jericho to spy out the city before the nation of Israel attacked it? Because she believed that God would **reward** her for siding with His people, the Jews. (v. 31)

I think we are seeing a pattern...

And if we had time to run through the stories of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets, we would see this same pattern repeat each and every time.

These men and women did what they did for God - lived for Him, sacrificed for Him, died for Him - because they believed that God would **reward** them for their faithfulness.

Some won great victories and some suffered crushing defeats, but their actions were sourced in a confidence that God knows how to **reward** His people. They believed that God is a **rewarder**.

I'm going to make a bit more of this as we close in just a minute, but I want you to at least notice here that not once do we see any of these people doing what they do for God because, "*Doggone it, it's the right thing to do.*"¹⁰

It was in their interest to obey God. They obeyed *because* - and God wanted them to obey Him *because* - they believed that God is a **rewarder**. He wants us to recognize that He is a good and gracious rewarder.

Now, in case you think that I'm only using Old Testament stories because the New Testament doesn't emphasize reward, listen to Jesus in the most famous sermon ever given, the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)

In these familiar words, listen for the idea of reward, if not for the word:

[5:3] "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

[4] "*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

[5] "*Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.*

[6] "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

[7] "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*

[8] "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

[9] "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

¹⁰ This idea that we do what we do simply because it is right to do it is called *altruism*. Altruism consists of sacrificing something (time, energy, money, possessions, etc...) with no expectation of any compensation or benefits, either direct, or indirect. Biblical faith and obedience is not altruistic. It is faith in God's goodness, faith in His nature as a rewarding God.

[10] "*Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

[11] "*Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.*

[12] "*Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

A little bit later on Jesus says this:

[6:1] "*Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.*

[2] "*So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.*

[3] "*But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, [4] so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.*

[5] "*When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. [6] "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.*

[16] "*Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. [17] "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face [18] so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.*

[19] "*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. [20] "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; [21] for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

That's just a small sampling of Jesus' comments about God's eagerness to reward His faithful people. We could find many, many more.

And if we wanted to and had the time to do so, we could add dozens more comments from the writings of the apostles Peter, Paul, and John about God being a rewarding God.

This facet of God's nature (REWARDER) is highlighted over and over again as a major incentive to godly living.

And if we would pass on a biblical faith to those with whom we live we will make abundantly clear that believing in Jesus is good for them. It is good for the one who believes.¹¹

This is not cheering for selfishness. Selfishness is living for what pleases me. Selfishness is ugly.

The Bible's teaching is quite different. It says, *"Live for God, trusting that when you do, it is ultimately in your self-interest. He knows how to reward His faithful people. You will never, in the long run, regret believing and following Jesus."*

If we would pass on a biblical faith we will emphasize overtly that we serve God to our own benefit.

Let your children know the great benefits that come from following Jesus.

When he or she is tired of a certain obedience, remind your husband / wife that God is a rewarder.

¹¹ Hear Richard Wurmbrand's comments in the February 2014 Voice of the Martyrs magazine. "Is it strange that the newsletter of a Christian organization should satisfy its readers' desire for profit? Any social system that is not built on that desire, placed by God himself in the human heart, will fail. The Bible is mainly an answer to the question, "What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance?" (Malachi 3:14) Jesus Himself asks, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Matthew 16:26) Paul writes that "godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come." (1 Timothy 4:8) So, what will you profit by reading this newsletter? It will greatly expand your vision."

Remind yourself that you will never, forever, in the long run, regret following Jesus. It honors and brings Him glory AND it is good for you. Taking that step to believe that God is a rewarder is taking a huge step toward building faith at home.