

INVISIBLE FRIEND

Can you remember back to when you were a child? Now think back to all the friends that you had. Did any of them seem a little different? Maybe some had red hair, or were taller than most, or had big feet? But what about that one friend that you had that didn't really even exist? Did you have an invisible friend? Almost everyone had an invisible friend in their life at some point. That invisible friend was always there for us and no one else had the benefit of getting to know them or stealing them from us. Some of us even went to the extreme where our friend was so important our parents had to set a place for him or her at the kitchen table for supper at night. Others of us could be seen outside playing, talking to what seemed like ourselves, and having the best time doing it.

The worst part happened when someone tried to tell us that our "friend" did not exist. We didn't care if no one else could see him or her, we had a friend and we believed that they existed. It was that belief and that faith that allowed us to continue playing with our "invisible friend" despite the fact that no one else believed like us. It was an indescribable faith that we had and unless others had experienced it, or had developed that type of faith or belief, nothing was going to convince them otherwise. This is very similar to what many of us face when dealing with our Christian faith. How can we explain someone that cannot be literally seen or touched with the physical body? Just as there is no possible way to describe our faith in our invisible friend, many times there is no rational explanation that others will accept for our belief in God. Despite our best intentions, faith cannot be explained.

For this week's lesson we are going to look at people who were recognized in the Bible for their extreme faith. These people were by no means perfect and were not always obedient, but one thing about them remains the same: they were strong in their faith.

Hebrews 11 is what many refer to as the "Hall of Faith." Despite the numerous differences between each of these individuals, one constant thread is woven throughout these Old Testament patriarchs: FAITH. As Christians, we place these individuals upon a pedestal, sometimes looking to them as "true" believers. What we do not realize, however, is the fact that all of these people were just that, ordinary people. They all grew up and faced many of the same things that we come in contact with every day of our lives. In certain defining moments, they chose, whatever their particular situation may have been, to believe God and that faith brought them through their trial and made them a Champion of Faith.

THEY WERE ORDINARY

As Christians, reading the Old Testament, we get so caught up in the stories that we forget to remember that these were ordinary people. We become paralyzed by the fact that they are known for their great acts that we overlook the idea that they are just normal people like us. Remember, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, and

many others who started out in humble beginnings. Noah was known as an ordinary, yet righteous man of God. Abraham and Sarah were the same. We must realize that God wants to use the ordinary to do extraordinary things. God uses ordinary people to allow others to see that He worked through the situation. None of these people could have conquered, overcome, or lived the lives that they did on their own power. God used them to show His power across the world at that time and even today as we read the Word. Remember, God does not call the qualified, He qualifies the called.

THEY FACED TRIALS

While we forget that these important people of the Old Testament were ordinary, we also forget the fact that these people all faced trials. The entire 11th chapter of the book of Hebrews is full of people who overcame trials through their faith in God. Noah was ridiculed by all the people around him as he made a boat and followed the will of God. Abraham went to a new and foreign land that God told him to dwell in, leaving his luxury life behind. Abraham was told to sacrifice His son that he had waited so long to have. And Sarah faced years of hurt and disgrace as she waited for the child she had thought would never come. Many others are mentioned in Hebrews 11, including Moses, who was left at childbirth and lived with the pharaoh who would try to kill him; Rahab, the prostitute; Joshua, marching around the wall of Jericho; and the list goes on and on. We are the same as these individuals. We are going to face trials, but we can overcome them, as the people mentioned in Hebrews 11 did, if we have faith in God.

THEY HAD FAITH

The defining factor for all of these individuals, no matter what the situation at hand was, or what different circumstances they were in, is that they had faith. They decided that they were going to believe in a higher power to take control of their circumstances. They trusted in God to deliver them from the trials that they were in. God took these ordinary people who were facing trials, and with His power, they overcame them. We are ordinary people and we are going through trials and the only way we are going to overcome these difficulties is if we have faith. We have to hope in God to see us through. God wants to use us, as ordinary people, to overcome the trials of the world and to show His glory. We must believe that God can do what He has done for others who have had faith. Faith is believing without seeing and knowing that God will take care of us. Many do not believe in the spiritual world because they feel as if they cannot see it, but we see the evidence of God's work all around us. We must have faith and we can overcome the trials that so easily entangle us.

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