

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

September 20, 2026

Heroes of the Faith

“Living as Foreigners Waiting for Our Heavenly Homeland”

Hebrews 11:13-16, 20-22, 29-30, 32-40

Rev. Mike Fordham

Since 2002, the *World Happiness Report* has used statistical analysis to determine the world's happiest countries. In its 2026 update, the report concluded that Finland is the happiest country in the world for the twelfth year in a row. To determine the world's happiest country, researchers analyzed comprehensive Gallup polling data from 147 countries for the past three years, specifically monitoring performance in six particular categories: gross domestic product per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom to make your own life choices, generosity of the general population, and perceptions of internal and external corruption levels. Six out of the top seven happiest countries in the world for 2026 were Northern European countries. In order after Finland, they are Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Costa Rica. The United States' (24), with the UK (23), Germany (22), the United Arab Emirates (21). The bottom five *least* happy countries are in order: Zimbabwe (143), Melawi (144), Lebanon (145), Sierra Leone (146), with the *least* happy country in the world being Afghanistan, whose 147th place ranking can be attributed in part to a low life expectancy rate, low gross domestic product rates per capita, and perhaps most importantly, the takeover of the Taliban. *No matter what country we call home, they all pale in comparison to the “heavenly homeland” that God is now preparing for all His people where life expectancy is eternal. Can’t beat that! For now, all of us Christians realize that where we now make our home is our temporary home away from home. While life can be overwhelming at times, we patiently endure all of life’s challenges as we live our lives in faith in the hope that one day we will all be together in our final forever home with God.* This faith-filled hope is what enabled all the heroes of faith to persevere to the very ends of their lives.

Hebrews 11:13-16, 20-22, 29-30, 32-40,

“¹³ All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth. ¹⁴ Obviously people who say such things are looking forward to a country they can call their own. ¹⁵ If they had longed for the country they came from, they could have gone back. ¹⁶ But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. ²⁰ It was by faith that Isaac promised blessings for the future to his sons, Jacob and Esau. ²¹ It was by faith that Jacob, when he was old and dying, blessed each of Joseph’s sons and bowed in worship as he leaned on his staff. ²⁹ It was by faith that

the people of Israel went right through the Red Sea as though they were on dry ground. But when the Egyptians tried to follow, they were all drowned.³⁰ It was by faith that the people of Israel marched around Jericho for seven days, and the walls came crashing down.³² How much more do I need to say? It would take too long to recount the stories of the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and all the prophets.³³ By faith these people overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions,³⁴ quenched the flames of fire, and escaped death by the edge of the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength. They became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight.³⁵ Women received their loved ones back again from death. But others were tortured, refusing to turn from God in order to be set free. They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection.³⁶ Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in prisons.³⁷ Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half, and others were killed with the sword. Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated.³⁸ They were too good for this world, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.³⁹ All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised.⁴⁰ For God had something better in mind for us, so that they would not reach perfection without us."

DID NOT FULLY RECEIVE WHAT GOD PROMISED

When the writer in Hebrews comes to verse 13 in *Chapter 11*, he takes a break for a few verses from listing the different heroes of the faith, to reflect on several important aspects of the faith of these women and men of God. He first points out that many of the heroes of the faith ***Did Not Fully Receive What God Promised***. God promised *Abraham* and *Sarah* their descendants will be as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashores, the stars in the sky, and the particles of dust that cover the world. Abraham and Sarah obviously died before they saw this come to pass. Hebrews says that by faith, *Isaac* promised blessings to his sons, Jacob and Esau, that would come to fruition long after Isaac was gone. Also, by faith *Jacob* blessed Joseph's sons before he left this world. It was by faith *Joseph* instructed the Israelites to take his bones with them knowing the Israelites would leave Egypt and one day to come into the land God promised His people. None of these heroes of the faith received the physical rewards God promised them during their lifetimes. Instead, they trusted that God would fulfill them in the future long after they left this world. They may not have seen God's promises fulfilled in their lifetime, but they saw it fulfilled with eyes of faith that looked to future fulfillment. Therefore, they did not die in despair, quit, or give up hope, but they held on to hopeful expectation that God's promises would one day come to pass. They were confident of God's faithfulness, even if His promises were not fulfilled during their lifetimes. They trusted God was at work and doing what was best in God's timing.

Have you ever prayed for something, and God didn't give you what you wanted? Or have you been earnestly praying for something or someone and it seems as if your prayers will never be answered? Do we patiently trust in God's timeline and wisdom and believe God will do what is best? Or, when we don't get what we want, when we want it, do we pitch a fit, like children throwing a temper tantrum for not getting what they wanted, and when they wanted it? These heroes of the faith grew to the point in their faith development where they were able to patiently wait for God to keep His promises according to God's timeline... even if it extended well beyond their lives. It is difficult to wait on God to show up and do what we want, when we want it; for God to bring desperately needed physical, mental, and emotional healing, for God to help us overcome our temptations, for God to heal a broken relationship, for God to miraculously move mountains in our lives. Elisabeth Elliot, the wife of slain missionary, Jim Elliot, whom I was blessed to hear her speak at one of my seminary classes, once said, "True faith goes into operation when there are no answers." We learn a lot about our faith in those times of waiting for God to bring much needed relief and answers to our desperate prayers.

True faith that puts its trust in God enables us to endure whatever challenges we face in life. Holocaust survivor, Viktor Frankl, once said, "A weak faith is weakened by predicaments and catastrophes whereas a strong faith is strengthened by them." True faith and trust in God believes that the words of *Romans 8:28* are true, which says, "*And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.*" We believe that God is working behind the scenes wisely, lovingly, bringing everything together according to His perfect will, and always for the good of those who love Him. I heard Carey Nieuwhof say in a devotional this week, "Just because God's isn't fast, doesn't mean God's not faithful." The heroes of the faith knew that God was still faithful even when God may not have fulfilled His promises as fast as they would have liked. They knew by faith that God was working all things out according to His good and perfect will in His perfect timing.

FOREIGNERS & NOMADS JUST PASSING THROUGH

Hebrews tells us one aspect of the faith of these women and men of God that enabled them to trust God and to not lose hope to the very end of their lives is that they understood they were ***Foreigners & Nomads Just Passing Through***. Hebrews says these heroes of the faith did not view this world as their permanent home. Some people, when they buy a home today, call their house their forever home. The heroes of the faith knew that no house, no piece of land, no country was their forever home. They understood that they were just passing through. The Apostle Peter understood the significance of this truth when he wrote in a letter to the church in *1 Peter 2:11-12*, "*11 Dear friends, I warn you as 'temporary residents and foreigners' to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. 12 Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world.*" We need to be careful how tightly we hold to the things of this world, because

we are only here for a short amount of time compared to eternity. As King David said in *Psalms 39:4-7*, “⁴ ‘Lord, remind me how brief my time on earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered—how fleeting my life is. ⁵ You have made my life no longer than the width of my hand. My entire lifetime is just a moment to you; at best, each of us is but a breath.’ ⁶ We are merely moving shadows, and all our busy rushing ends in nothing. We heap up wealth, not knowing who will spend it. ⁷ And so, Lord, where do I put my hope? My only hope is in you.” We are only here in this world for a very short time as temporary residents and foreigners. Therefore, with the little bit of time we have, God calls on us to have faith and trust in Him every step of the way and He will see us through it all.

Living this short, but very important life in this manner will not only help us to live it as best as possible with faith and trust in God, it will also give us the endurance we need when we are walking through difficult times. We know that no matter how bad life might get, this too shall pass! I was blessed to travel to South Africa, but I will say the sixteen-hour flight there and back was definitely a test of my patience. The longest I have ever flown was twelve hours to Israel and that was a long flight, but this one was a test. When I got on the plane to be seated, I made the mistake of looking to the left at the First class. My heart felt envy as it looked like they were living in mini apartments. Not a bad way to spend sixteen hours. I then turned right and walked a long way down the aisle and noticed in each section the seats seemed to get smaller and closer together until I arrived almost at the back of the plane in the economy cheap seats in Zone six of seven. In that section you get to know people very well as you are seated very close to each other, front and back, left and right. Thankfully, I know enough to choose the aisle seat to be able to stretch my legs. I don't sleep well on those flights but there were those around me who had no problem whatsoever as I could hear them snoring even though I was wearing noise cancelling air pods. I filled my time with movies, reading, an occasional catnap, and walking back and forth to the restrooms just to keep the blood flowing in my legs. I kept reminding myself during the flight that this was temporary, that this too shall pass soon. My time in South Africa was a great experience but even so I knew it wasn't home for me. It was a temporary home away from home. The heroes of the faith understood they were quickly passing through this short, frail, temporary life in this world. With that in mind they made the most of their time here and trusted God to see them through to the end of their lives.

LIVED WITH THE HOPE OF INHERITING GOD'S PROMISE OF AN ETERNAL, HEAVENLY HOMELAND

Hebrews tells us not only did these heroes of the faith view their lives as temporarily passing through this world as foreigners and nomads, they ***Lived with the Hope of Inheriting God's Promise of an Eternal, Heavenly Homeland***. Hebrews says that the heroes desired a better country—a heavenly one. Even those who were in the Promised Land knew that this was not their forever home. There was something much better waiting for them at the end of their lives. Their deepest desire was not a piece of land on earth, but a spiritual home with God. Somehow, by faith, they knew that God has prepared a permanent, eternal city for them that awaited them when they will raise from the dead to eternal life. It is interesting that before Jesus died, He said to His disciples in

John 14:2-3, “¹Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. ² There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? ³ When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.” This echoes the words of *Hebrews 11:16* that says God has prepared a city for them. In *Revelation 21* we are told that this new city God is preparing will be the result of a new heaven, and new earth becoming one.

We know enough from the Bible that this life isn’t all there is for us. We have hope in something far greater than this life that is to come after we step through death’s door. When my father passed away twenty years ago this next month and I did his funeral, I was comforted by the words of *1 Thessalonians 4:13-18* that says, “¹³ And now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died. ¹⁵ We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. ¹⁷ Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ So encourage each other with these words.”

We are to be encouraged in the face of life’s difficulties by the fact of what God has in store for us when we will all raise from the dead at the end of time and be given new, eternal bodies that will make our forever home in the new heaven and new earth. In December 1666, Hugh MacHale, the youngest and most gallant of the Covenanters, was brought to his trial in Edinburgh. He was given four days to live and then marched back to the prison. And in the crowd on the street, many were weeping that one so young and so gallant should have only four days more to see the sun shine. But there were no tears in the eyes of this young man of God. As he marched past the crowd, they heard him cry out, “Trust in God.” And then suddenly he saw a friend of his standing on the edge of the crowd, and he shouted to him, “Good news; wonderful, good news! I am within four days of enjoying the sight of Jesus, my Savior!” Even though he knew he was getting ready to be executed for his faith, it was his faith in God that enabled him to rejoice in the fact that he would see Jesus in the next few days. That’s a pretty amazing eternal perspective! As the Apostle Paul said in *Philippians 1:21-24*, “²¹ For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. ²² But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don’t know which is better. ²³ I’m torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. ²⁴ But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live.” George Palmer said before he died, “I’m homesick for heaven. It’s the hope of dying that has kept me alive this long.” There is a long list of people in *Hebrews 11* who endured all kinds of challenges, sufferings and trials but they endured them faithfully until the end of their lives because they held on to the hope of God’s promise of an eternity where all sin will once and forever be washed away and we will be healed of the destructive power of sin forever!

If you are going through a challenging time where maybe you are even wondering where God is in the midst of it all, be encouraged He loves you, is working behind the scenes for your good, and that of His perfect will. Remember this life is short and we are only passing through. This too shall pass! In the meantime, let us live by faith by following Jesus, trusting in God, all the while doing so with the hope of one day receiving our inheritance of eternal life where we will inherit our forever home.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES: (Books marked with * are available to be checked-out in the Asbury Discipleship Resource Center)

- *Be Confident: Live by Faith, Not by Sight*, Warren W. Wiersbe
- *The Pursuit of God*, A. W. Tozer
- *The Treasure Principle*, Randy Alcorn
- *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Donald S. Whitney
- *The Class Meeting*, Kevin Watson
- *Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts*, Jerry Bridges
- *The Holiness of God*, R. C. Sproul
- *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*, Henry Blackaby & Richard Blackaby
- *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A.W. Tozer
- *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- *Don't Waste Your Life*, John Piper
- *A long Obedience in the Same Direction*, Eugene Peterson
- *Heaven*, Randy Alcorn

Icebreaker Questions

1. Have you ever taken a long trip where you enjoyed the journey but were still really glad to get home? What made home feel so good?
2. What is something you have had to wait a long time for, and what did the waiting teach you about patience or trust?

Sermon Discussion Questions

1. Hebrews 11 tells us that many heroes of the faith died without seeing God's promises fully fulfilled. What does their example teach us about the difference between trusting God and simply expecting God to give us what we want?
2. Pastor Mike asks what happens when we pray earnestly and an answer seems delayed—or never comes in the way we hoped. What makes waiting on God particularly difficult, and what practices can help us remain faithful during seasons when we do not have answers?
3. Hebrews describes God's people as "foreigners and nomads" in this world. What might look different about our priorities, possessions, relationships, or use of time if we genuinely viewed this life as temporary rather than our "forever home"?
4. Pastor Mike says that remembering "this too shall pass" can give us endurance during difficult seasons. How can an eternal perspective give us hope without causing us to minimize the very real pain, grief, or struggles we experience today?
5. Hebrews 11 describes believers who experienced both remarkable victories and tremendous suffering, yet all continued living by faith. What would it look like for you personally to "live by faith" this week while trusting God's timing and keeping your hope fixed on your heavenly homeland?
6. What impacted you most from the sermon?
7. How might this group pray for you this week?