



Sermon Growth Guide

February 9, 2025
God Faithfully Sustains



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Key Verse: Hebrews 11:40

“Since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”

Big Idea: God has a plan for all of his people together.

Foundations

With these verses, the writer of Hebrews completes his roll of the Old Testament heroes of faith. In chapter 12, he will begin to flesh out his purpose in reminding us about them. But in the meantime, he reveals that God has a plan for all of his people together.

God's purpose is to “make us perfect” together. This means that, through Jesus Christ, God is freeing us from the power of sin so that we can be resurrected with all of God's people throughout time into eternal life.

This means we need each other. We need the encouragement and wisdom from those who have gone before us in order to persevere in our faith and pursue the righteousness that is available to us in Christ. (Hebrews 12:1) We need one another now for the same purpose. And we need our collective witness and life in order to draw others into the life of Christ, whose mission was “to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:10). We won't be made perfect together until all of God's people throughout time are assembled.

Even though we, unlike our Old Testament brothers and sisters, have received Christ, it still feel as if we do not always see the fruit of our labor as we wait for our final perfection at the end of all things. (Hebrews 11:39) But don't lose heart. We'll make it home together.

Understanding God's Word

Together read Hebrews 11:29-40.

Take some time to consider the final examples of faith and look up their stories in the Old Testament. How does their faith encourage you? Are you surprised by anyone in the list? Why do you think they were included?

Applying God's Word

The collective witness of the heroes points to both the triumphs and the sufferings of faith. How do you see each one playing out in your own lives?

What does it look like for your community to encourage and support one another as we persevere in our faith and pursue righteousness in Christ? Is there some way you could do this better?

Witnessing God's Word

2 Peter 3:9 says “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

God is waiting for the full number of his people to come to Christ before he comes again, and we are part of God's mission to seek and to save the lost. If you know someone who needs Christ, begin praying for them and reaching out to them in love and friendship.

I had the joy of sitting in the congregation last week and hearing a great sermon about the Passover and the power of the blood on a Communion Sunday. What a great church! As I sat in the 11:00, I looked over and saw a girl full asleep on her father's lap. Some are brought to the Lord kicking and screaming, others are carried in sleeping. In front of me a mother was prodding her teenager to look up and maybe catch a little about the Passover and the atoning work of Christ on the cross. I'm not sure it got through. I had my own 15-year-old to encourage next to me. I was moved by the hand of the mother rubbing her child's back, and the sweet arms of the father holding his daughter in place. My hand was a little more of a backhand slap. I'm not used to this detail. We encourage one another along. We need to be sustained, over the long haul. Not just the sermon, I mean a life of pursuing God, coming to worship, feeding on the Word, the Table, the fellowship. We need to be sustained over time for things to happen. Parents, don't give up prodding those kids along. Kids...wake up.

We are learning together that God's Mission Has a Church. God is up to something. We have seen that there is a mighty cause for us to take up. God created the world and makes Himself known. The world fell into corruption, rebellion and sin. Rather than abandon it and start over somewhere else, God moved to redeem this world. God made a covenant with Abraham, a promise to reach and save all nations. God provided a rescue in the Exodus, the Passover. God's mission is underway. If God has a mission, that is the thought that should occupy all our minds; God's priorities, God's concerns, they should immediately overtake all our priorities and concerns. If God is on a mission, we need to be part of it. Ed Stetzer wrote in his book *Subversive Kingdom*: "The gospel is not merely the story of the Bible and the only hope for hopeless mankind. It is indeed the grandest expression of God's mission. And God's mission needs to be our mission. ...It should orient our schedule and priorities. It should dictate our activities and why we do them. Because actually, the church

doesn't have a mission; the mission has a church." I want us to understand this bigger gospel, the grand narrative, the story of everything: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation. God made the world and us in it for joyful relationship. We rebelled and took the world with us. God redeems His fallen world; He buys it back, as we will see. Now we are waiting for God to put it all back together again, the consummation. But what is missing in all that is what I want us to see today. What is missing is the mother's patient hand on the back, the father's loving arms holding us up. Maybe a backhand here or there! This story doesn't get from beginning to end except that God sustains it all through time. God Faithfully Sustains. Maybe you need to hear that today. Over history, over all time, in your own life. God faithfully sustains.

We pick up then in the Hall of Faith at verse 29: "By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned." (Hebrews 11:29) Nothing beats Cecil B. DeMille's 1956 film "The Ten Commandments" for this. It is still what I picture. It took faith to step down into that seabed with those enormous walls of water suspended on either side. But it's also true they had nowhere else to go. Some of the most powerful moments of faith in your life are when you are absolutely stuck. There is no other option. "Here I stand," said Martin Luther, "I can do no other." When you feel trapped, do keep walking with Jesus. You might look back and find it was your finest hour.

"By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days." (Hebrews 11:30) They didn't fall after one day; they didn't fall after six days. This is what we call seven-day faith. Faith, because there was no evidence, no reasonable theory at all that this would work. Walk around the city singing and praying. Great plan. We're dead. One day, nothing. Two days, nothing. Three days, nothing. Four days, five days, six... What does it take to get up that seventh day? Have you ever been in a season when nothing seems to work? Kanter's

Law, "Everything looks like a failure in the middle." Nelson Mandela, "It always seems impossible until it's done." Keep walking with Jesus even when you don't see the results you long for. God's purposes may be just around the next corner.

"By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient." (Hebrews 11:31) The last name fully celebrated in the Hall of Faith is Rahab, a woman in a time when women were not regarded equally, a Gentile, a person with a checkered past, but she risked it all to believe God was going to keep His promises to His people. So, she got to be a part of the promise. She is in the line of the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1. Have you ever wondered if your history disqualified you from being part of God's story? Hang on, in faith, to Jesus. He is able to bring new life. No past is past the grace of Jesus.

Then we get a finishing barrage, a finale of fireworks going off. Boom. Boom. Boom. Gideon. Samuel. Barak. Samson. It's interesting who gets named and who was left off. Some of them are not great. Scripture is trying to teach us, if even this guy is commended for faith, maybe you? David is used to being a little higher on the marquee. Some big names don't show at all, but we know we are talking about Daniel here, and Elijah, and Isaiah because of what it says. "Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 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—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground." (Hebrews 11:35-38) The world wasn't worthy of them. That's how I felt when I had the chance to visit the Egyptian Martyrs Memorial Church in Egypt honoring the 21 martyrs who

were beheaded by ISIS on the beach in Libya in 2015. I read this passage, I think of them, and I marvel at the comfort and luxury of my 51 years. What is this time and place we have, friends, where we have so much at our disposal, so much security, so many resources, so much leisure? Are we putting it to proper use? Christians don't live like this; not in history, not around the world. I hope we are using this blessing as God intends.

The Hall of Faith ends with this barrage of figures. What do they all have in common? They are not perfect. They are sinners, like you and me. John Calvin wrote, "In every saint there is always to be found something reprehensible. Nevertheless although faith may be imperfect and incomplete it does not cease to be approved by God." They had faith. If it was all down to them and their abilities, we'd all be lost. But this isn't the Hall of Fame, this is the Hall of Faith. They all found themselves in impossible situations, backs against the wall, no prospect for success, no reason to believe they could overcome the odds, up against overwhelming opposition. Walls don't fall when you walk around. Oceans don't split so you can escape a army. Lions don't shut their mouths, and fire doesn't fail to burn. But they had faith. And some of them did burn. Some of them did die. Still, they had faith. That's the amazing thing about faith. The church father John Chrysostom said, "For the wonderful qualities of Faith are two, that it both accomplishes great things, and suffers great things, and counts itself to suffer nothing." Faith doesn't die when things don't go well. They had faith. Have faith.

But have faith in the right thing. In London, at Kings Cross Station, they set up a little tourist spot pretending to be Platform 9 ¾, where Harry Potter gets picked up to go to Hogwarts. And they put a luggage cart halfway into the wall so you can take a picture and act like you are passing through the bricks into the magic train platform. You had to run. In the book, you had to run straight into the brick wall to make it through. It was an act of faith. It goes by fast. A man tried to do it a few years ago. Can I say, it is

important where you put your faith? It isn't having faith that matters; it is the object of your faith! Place your faith in Jesus.

If God was faithful, God will be faithful. God faithfully sustains. Part of God's mission is to keep this thing going all the way along to the end. The old elders called it "providence." The Heidelberg Catechism asks: "What is the providence of God? God's providence is the almighty and ever-present power of God by which he upholds heaven and earth together with all creatures by his own hand. He rules in such a way that leaves and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and unfruitful years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, and everything else, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand." That's what Hebrews is telling us today. God faithfully sustains. And if he met all these men and women when their backs were against the wall, and rescued them, or walked with them through pain and suffering so that their lives are part of the greatest story ever told, their lives mean something...if God did all that. He'll do it again. We sing a song in worship called "Do It Again." "I've seen You move, You move the mountains; And I believe, I'll see You do it again. You made a way, where there was no way; And I believe, I'll see You do it again. Your promise still stands; Great is Your faithfulness; I'm still in Your hands; This is my confidence, You never failed me yet." Look back and see. God faithfully sustains.

The mother with her hand on the back of her son in worship is playing the long game. God plays the long game. He faithfully sustains His church. I think that is beautiful; not to be overlooked. What is the beauty of a marriage? We have some long marriages in this church. We have some 75-year marriages. What is the value of a marriage? What if you asked a wife and she said, "You know, it really was that one good year. There was that year when he really outperformed. He husbanded as good as it gets! Every gift was curated, every card had original, thoughtful remarks, and on time. The rest of the years were trash, but that one high-flying year, that's why I'm in it." Or, "That trip to Paris in 1995. We really

splashed out." You'd say something was wrong with that, wouldn't you? No. It wasn't one high-flying success. It was years and years faithfully sustained by love and grace, forgiveness and patience, leaning over, one on the other, back and forth. That's the beauty. That's the beauty of the church. God's mission has a church. God is playing the long game. I was thinking that about our church. You know, if we were an investment—we are not Bitcoin. You know? We are not launching up and crashing down. We are more like a T-bill or a nice 4% savings with compounding interest. We are playing the long game. It's not flashy, but it is faithful. The fruit will speak for itself in time. God faithfully sustains. Hold on. All of these had faith, even though they didn't see what they hoped. "These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised." (Hebrews 11:39) All of our hoping, all of our striving is incomplete. God is still at work. The Kingdom is still coming. They didn't receive it. Why? "Since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect." (Hebrews 11:40) What is that something better? The better covenant. The better Exodus. The better Passover. The better sacrifice. Jesus. Now we are part of their story. We are part of their waiting. The hopes of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; of Noah and Moses and Rahab; all of them, all of their hopes, all of their faith, now waits until we play our part, and our children, and our children's children, until the Lord returns. This is the something better. None of them received. But they will. Jesus has made it so. Jesus said, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20) Why did He say that? Because He became a wanderer, so we could make our way home. Jesus became unsatisfied, emptied, so we could one day have the fulness of life. Jesus left it all, all security, all safety, all surpassing power, and He became weak, His sustenance was cut off on the cross so that we, by faith in Him, could be brought into the Kingdom of everlasting glory. Believe in Him and be sustained.