

Faith's Unseen Anchor

Picture a ship tossed in a wild storm, waves crashing, sky dark with clouds. The captain doesn't look at the stars—he can't see them. Instead, he trusts a compass carved with God's promises, pointing him safely through the chaos. This is faith, as we see in Hebrews 11:17–31, a gallery of people who trusted God's unseen Word, even when life roared against them. Using the English Standard Version, let's explore how Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and others lived by faith—*pistis* in Greek, a deep trust in God's truth—and how their stories point us to Jesus, who makes faith real.

We begin with Abraham, tested to his core. “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named’” (Hebrews 11:17–18, ESV). God had promised Abraham a great nation through Isaac, yet now He asked for Isaac's life. The Greek word *pistis* here means more than believing—it's a rock-solid trust in God's faithfulness. Abraham's hand held the knife, but his heart held God's promise. Verse 19 tells us why: “He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back” (Hebrews 11:19, ESV). The word *logisamenos*, meaning “having reckoned,” shows Abraham thought it through. He trusted God could raise Isaac from death, pointing to the resurrection we know in Jesus.

This trust shines in Polycarp, a bishop in Smyrna in the second century. When Roman soldiers ordered him to curse Christ or face a fiery death, Polycarp stood firm: “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?” His *pistis* was like Abraham's, trusting God's promise of life beyond the grave,

even as flames rose around him. Polycarp's faith teaches us to hold fast to God's Word, no matter the cost, knowing Jesus has overcome death.

Next, the patriarchs look to the future. "By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones" (Hebrews 11:20–22, ESV). These men didn't see God's promises fully come true in their lifetimes, but their pistis trusted God's plan for generations yet unborn. Joseph, a powerful man in Egypt, could have stayed buried there. Instead, he insisted his bones be carried to the Promised Land, showing his faith in God's future deliverance.

John Wycliffe, a 14th-century English theologian, lived this way. He believed everyone should read God's Word, so he translated the Bible into English, even when church leaders called him a heretic. They burned his books and, after his death, dug up and burned his bones. Yet Wycliffe's work spread God's truth, sparking reform. Like Joseph, his faith looked beyond his life, trusting God's promises to shape the future. This reminds us that faith isn't just for today—it trusts God for tomorrow, too.

Then we see Moses' parents, defying a king. "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict" (Hebrews 11:23, ESV). Pharaoh ordered all Hebrew baby boys killed, but Moses' parents hid him. The Greek *ekrybē*, meaning "was hidden," shows their bold choice to trust God's plan over a king's threat. They saw God's purpose for Moses and weren't scared, because they trusted the invisible God more than a visible danger.

William Tyndale, a 16th-century translator, showed this courage. He wanted everyone to read the Bible in English, but the church and king banned it. Tyndale worked in secret, hiding from those hunting him. Even

when he was caught and executed in 1536, he prayed, “Lord, open the King of England’s eyes.” His pistis, like that of Moses’ parents, put God’s truth first, trusting Him despite danger. Tyndale’s story challenges us to stand for God’s Word, even when it’s hard.

Moses himself made a bold choice: “By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin” (Hebrews 11:24–25, ESV). The word *helomenos*, “having chosen,” shows Moses picked God’s path on purpose, giving up a life of luxury. Verse 26 explains: “He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward” (Hebrews 11:26, ESV). *Hēgēsamenos*, “having esteemed,” means Moses saw suffering for God as better than gold, because he trusted in God’s eternal promise.

Martin Luther, the 16th-century reformer, lived this faith. At the Diet of Worms in 1521, he faced the emperor and church leaders demanding he take back his teachings. Luther stood firm: “Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason... my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant.” Like Moses, Luther chose God’s truth over safety, trusting in the eternal reward. His courage shows us that faith means picking God’s way, even when it’s tough, because His promises are sure.

Faith leads to action: “By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them” (Hebrews 11:27–28, ESV). Moses saw the God no one else could, and that gave him strength. The Passover, with its blood saving God’s people, points to Jesus, the true Lamb who saves us from sin.

The text ends with victories: “By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were

drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies” (Hebrews 11:29–31, ESV). These show pistis as a group effort—trusting God to part seas, topple walls, and save through risky choices like Rahab’s.

C.F.W. Walther, the 19th-century Lutheran leader, embodies this collective faith. In 1839, Walther and hundreds of Saxon Lutherans fled Germany for America, seeking freedom to worship according to their conscience. Facing perilous seas and an uncertain future, they trusted God’s promise to preserve His church. Their steadfastness laid the foundation for a confessional Lutheran presence in America, mirroring Rahab’s risky alignment with God’s people.

These stories teach us faith means trusting God’s promises, like Abraham believing in life after death, Moses choosing God over riches, and Rahab helping God’s people. Jesus makes it all happen: He’s like Isaac, given up for us on the cross; like the Passover Lamb, His blood washes away our sins; and like the leader who parted the sea, He breaks through our fears. Faith isn’t something we create—it’s a gift Jesus gives us. He forgives all our mistakes, makes us friends with God, and gives us strength to face hard days. Because of Jesus, we can trust God every day, knowing He’s right beside us, guiding our souls to heaven and on to the resurrection to the eternal glory of God and the world to come. Amen.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in Him.

Pastor Ron Bright Christ Lutheran Church Forest Hills, Pennsylvania

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