

ELEVEN – Hebrews 11 sermon series

MAKING GOD SMILE

Series: Eleven

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Scripture: Hebrews 11

Key sermon points:

- The essence of audacious confidence
- That's not faith
- Faith is an awareness of the invisible world that produces conviction leading to action
- Faith wagers on God's goodness
- Faith prioritizes relationship with God above all
- Faith surrenders personal reputation
- Faith makes Him smile
- A step of faith

NOW FAITH IS THE ASSURANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR, THE CONVICTION OF THINGS NOT SEEN, FOR BY IT THE PEOPLE HAVE ALL RECEIVED THEIR COMMENDATION. BY FAITH WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE UNIVERSE WAS CREATED BY THE WORD OF GOD, SO THAT WHAT IS SEEN WAS NOT MADE OUT OF THINGS THAT ARE VISIBLE BY FAITH. ABEL OFFERED TO GET A MORE ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE THAN CAIN, THROUGH WHICH HE WAS COMMENDED AS RIGHTEOUS. GOD COMMENDING HIM BY ACCEPTING HIS GIFTS AND THROUGH HIS FAITH, THOUGH HE DIED, HE STILL SPEAKS. BY FAITH ENOCH WAS TAKEN UP SO THAT HE SHOULD NOT SEE DEATH AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD HAD TAKEN HIM. NOW BEFORE HE WAS TAKEN, HE WAS COMMENDED AS HAVING PLEASED GOD AND WITHOUT FAITH IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE HIM FOR WHOEVER WHO DRAW NEAR TO GOD MUST BELIEVE THAT HE EXISTS AND THAT HE REWARDS THOSE WHO SEEK HIM. BY FAITH NOAH BEING WARNED BY GOD CONCERNING EVENTS AS YET UNSEEN, IN REVERENT FEAR CONSTRUCTED AN ARK FOR THE SAVING OF HIS HOUSEHOLD AND BY THIS HE CONDEMNED THE WORLD AND BECAME AN HEIR OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT COMES BY FAITH.

AUDACIOUS CONFIDENCE

Three days before Super Bowl 1968, Joe Namath, the Jets quarterback, was being honored at the Miami Touchdown Club. He was about to face the Colts, who were the 18-point favorites in the Super Bowl. As Namath steps up to the mic, a Colts fan calls out from the back of the room, "The Colts are going to kick your butt." Joe Namath pauses, looks into the camera and responds, "Hey, I got news for you. We're going to win on Sunday, *I'll guarantee you...*"

The place was silent, shocked that someone would have the audacious confidence to guarantee victory in the Super Bowl, especially being 18 points behind in the odds. But if you know history, and if you know the NFL, the Jets did win that Super Bowl. And Broadway Joe went down in history for his guts, for his boldness and for his confidence.

October 1, 1932. The World Series. The score is tied four to four and Babe Ruth steps up to the plate. Before he swings at the pitch, he points out to center field. The pitch comes through. Babe Ruth swings and hits the ball 440 feet into the outfield, past the bleachers and out of the stadium. He wins the game for the Yankees and the Great Bambino goes down as a legend because he called his shot and won the World Series.

Why are those moments etched in our minds? Many people who don't even follow baseball or football have heard of those two stories. In our minds, those moments live on. Though they are old stories, from 1932 and from 1968, we still know them today. There's something about those moments that resonates, that makes all of us stand up and pay attention. In one way, something in these moments kind of offends us. How could a person be so arrogant as to call their shot? Or how could a quarterback be so confident to guarantee victory? There's a part of us that's a bit put off by these moments, but, if we're honest, there's also a part of us that's a bit envious. What would it take to have confidence like that and to come through? There's something in all of us that wants to be that confident and to come through in our own moments.

Hebrews Chapter 11 is one of the most inspiring chapters in the entire Bible. In fact, I think it's probably my favorite chapter in the scriptures. I've been waiting to study Hebrews Chapter 11 with you since we started the church, so this one's been a long time coming for me. It's an incredible chapter. If you know the back-story of what's happening when this book was written, it will help reveal why these words are so powerful. It was written to a group of first century Jewish Christians who were being persecuted because they followed Jesus. Their families were being separated. They were being thrown in prison. Their homes were being taken from them. They were a church in turmoil. Hebrews was written to comfort them, but also to inspire them... to tell them that Jesus is worth it.

That was the message that the writer wanted to get across, that Jesus is worth it. If you read the New Testament, you find that Jesus carries this same high level of audacious confidence that's so attractive to people right. In the stories of Jesus, he constantly demonstrates an incredible sense of confidence. For example, he's asleep in a boat and the disciples are freaking out because the waves and the wind are crashing on the sea. They wake Jesus up and they say, "Jesus, Jesus, we're going to die here in this boat! What are you doing asleep?" So Jesus gets up, looks out at the sea, and says, "Hey, cut it out." He looks back at his disciples and says, "What are you guys so afraid of? Relax." Then he lies back down. And the disciples are all like, "Who is this guy?" Or the day Jesus shows up at Lazarus' funeral. Lazarus has been dead for four days and Jesus steps up and says, "Don't worry about it. Your brother will rise from the dead." And he calls Lazarus out of the grave and back to life.

In Chapter nine of Mark's gospel, we find Jesus coming down off of a mountain after being with his disciples. He encounters a man with a son who is oppressed by a demon, and nobody can help him. The man has tried a thousand different things and he looks to Jesus and says, "Jesus, if you can help, please help me." Jesus looks at the man and, as if the words "if you can" were not even in his vocabulary, says, "All things are possible for him who believes."

Jesus had this audacious sense of confidence and it's the book of Hebrews that helps us understand the essence of Jesus' assurance and confidence. In Chapters 1-3 of the book of Hebrews, we find that Jesus is compared to angels. The writer tells us that Jesus is greater than all the angelic beings in creation, that he is higher than the angels. In Chapters 3-4, Jesus is compared to Moses. We're told that Jesus is the greater Moses, the true Moses, and that, just as Moses delivered Israel from Egypt, so Jesus delivers

humanity from sin and hell. Jesus is the greater deliverer. In Chapters 4-7, Jesus is compared to the great high priests of Israel who made atonement for the people by entering the holy of holies. We are told that Jesus is the great high priest of the human race. Then in Chapters 8-10, we're taught about the Old Testament sacrifices and how Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament sacrifices, and that he's greater than those Old Testament sacrifices.

Throughout these chapters, the writer wants us to understand that there is something unique about Jesus, that there is something different about Jesus, that his bold confidence was not the brand of Joe Nemeth or Babe Ruth, although on the outside it might look similar. It wasn't an arrogance or boasting confidence. He was not confident in himself; instead his confidence was rooted in his relationship with the Father. So Jesus was both audaciously confident and deeply humble at the same time. He's the one who could command the storm and then welcome the little children. He's the one who could rebuke the demon and then stoop down to wash the disciples' feet.

THAT'S NOT FAITH

In Hebrews 11, we find a collection of people who lived with this collision of humility and confidence. The book of Hebrews gives that attitude a name. It calls that attitude *faith*. What is faith? Most of us are familiar with that word. You've heard it a million times in your life. Faith is a word that people use for all sorts of things: "These are people of faith" or "This is a faith-based initiative" or "This is a faith-filled group" or whatever it might be. We hear and say a lot of different phrases associated with the idea of faith. Some of us think that faith is a feeling, like when you feel very sure of yourself, or very unsure, you might say, "I don't have a whole lot of faith." But really what you mean is, "I don't feel it that much." Well if you find yourself there, the good news is that faith is not a feeling. According to scripture, faith is not just a feeling that you have. In fact, feelings will often get in the way of real faith. They are not the same thing.

People also sometimes think that faith is like a desire. If I really want something desperately, maybe that's faith. No, faith is not a desire. Faith is not just wanting something very badly. Some of us think that faith is acting like something is yours when it is not. That's called pretending and pretending is not the same as faith. If you don't have a car but say, "In faith I have a car. I'm getting in my car." But you're standing there and there's no car around. That's not faith. Faith is not saying you have something if you don't have or acting like you have something if you don't. That's not the essence of faith.

FAITH IS AN AWARENESS OF THE INVISIBLE WORLD THAT PRODUCES CONVICTION LEADING TO ACTION.

The writer of Hebrews starts chapter 11 by giving us a functional outline of faith:

NOW FAITH IS THE ASSURANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR, THE CONVICTION OF THINGS NOT SEEN. (HEBREWS 11:1)

"The assurance of things hoped for." These words tell us that faith is more than hope. We all know about hope, and hope is important, but faith is more than hope. There is something beyond hope, something greater, something larger than hope. It has to do with an awareness that there is a world beyond my sight. In Verse 3, we're told that things that are invisible made everything that was made. Trees and

humans and galaxies and solar systems were all made by an invisible God. Everything that we see is not the essence of life. There is something else beneath it. This can be very difficult for our 2018 naturalistic perspective on life because we're told in schools and in common culture that matter is all there is. That what we can see or feel or touch is all there is. But, in fact, as we explore matter more, science is coming to the conclusion again and again that there is an invisible order behind the matter. When you study things like the electromagnetic forces or the distance of the planets or gravity on planet Earth, you discover a force that seems to be evidence of fine-tuning.

Recently I read Fred Hoyle, the astronomer who coined the phrase "the Big Bang." He said:

A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super intellect is monkeyed with the physics, as well as with chemistry and biology and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature. The numbers when calculated from the facts seem to me so overwhelming to put this conclusion almost beyond question.

In other words, he's saying that there seems to be an invisible order behind the visible matter of life. The writer of Hebrews calls this "the evidence of things unseen." There is evidence all around us that there is, in fact, an unseen world behind it all.

This is where faith begins: with an awareness that there is a world that I cannot see, an awareness that there is a reality that my senses cannot pick up on. But it doesn't stay there. Awareness has to grow into a personal conviction. You have to develop a confidence in the reality of things unseen. This is where scripture becomes so important. We hear about Jesus. We hear about the cross. We hear about resurrection. We hear about the power of new life in Christ. When we hear these things, and are convinced that the scriptures are reliable, and begin to trust in these invisible realities, our awareness moves to personal conviction. Now I have a conviction. I'm not just aware, now I believe in Jesus. I believe in the cross. I believe he cleansed my sins by dying on the cross. I believe he rose from the dead physically and that He gives me new life spiritually.

It begins with awareness. It moves to personal conviction. But faith must take another step. It must act on those convictions. For thousands of years now, theologians have talked about these three elements as the essence of faith. I want to give them to you in a working definition:

Faith is an awareness of the invisible world that produces conviction leading to action.

Imagine that you're trapped on the third floor of a house on fire. You're up there thinking, "This is a nightmare." It is a nightmare. You're on the third floor. You can see the stairwell but you can't actually see the stairs because of the smoke, but you know that there are stairs there. You're trapped up there and you can't go down the stairs because the flames are too intense. You're stuck there. Then, in the midst of your panic, you hear someone yelling from below. They're shouting your name and as they're shouting, you recognize their voice. It's the voice of your neighbor, who happens to be the strongest, most athletic, most in shape person you've ever met in your life. They're very strong right and they're yelling, "Hey! I know you're trapped up there. Jump down and I'll catch you. You can't take the stairs. Jump from the window and I'll catch you."

In this scenario, there are three things happening at the same time. First you must be aware that the person is there. That's where your ears help; you hear them. Then you have to be convinced that this

person could in fact catch you, that they could perform what they're saying they can. So that's the second piece, the conviction part. But that's not enough. If you just stay up there and say, "Okay, I hear you and I believe that you could catch me. Thank you so much," it would not be very helpful. You have to jump. You have to act.

These are the three elements of faith: awareness, conviction and action based upon that conviction. This is critical because God is spirit and you are physical. There's a divide between you and God and the only way to interact with the realm of the spirit is through awareness, personal conviction and then a step of action by faith. Romans Chapter 1 says it like this:

THE GOOD NEWS TELLS US HOW GOD MADE US RIGHT IN HIS SIGHT. THIS IS ACCOMPLISHED FROM START TO FINISH BY FAITH

FAITH WAGERS ON GOD'S GOODNESS

Faith has been described as a diamond. There are many facets to faith. There are many angles to faith, many glorious different perspectives. The writer of Hebrews understands that faith is best understood, not just through a definition, but also through practical application in the lives of people. So in the first seven verses of Chapter 11, the writer illustrates this life of faith through three different people, chronologically moving through the Old Testament.

He starts with Abel.

BY FAITH ABEL OFFERED TO GOD A MORE ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE THAN CAIN, THROUGH WHICH HE WAS COMMANDED AS RIGHTEOUS, GOD COMMENDING HIM BY HIS GIFTS AND THROUGH HIS FAITH THOUGH HE DIED, HE STILL SPEAKS. (HEBREWS 11:4)

In the story of Abel, there are two brothers, Cain and Abel. They both bring a sacrifice to God. Cain brings produce from the land — vegetables and fruits and these types of things — and he sacrifices them to God. Then Abel brings the firstborn lamb of his flock and sacrifices it to God. We're told that Cain is rejected and that Abel is accepted. Why? People have argued about this for generations, but the answer is actually right in the text. We're told that one is accepted and the other is rejected because the postures of their hearts were different. When Cain gave his sacrifice, he gave it with what we might call "Joe Namath confidence," a confidence that says, "I know I can do it. I know I can perform." It was rooted in self. In other words, "Look what I've done. I'm going to give this to you God. I'm going to sacrifice. See how much I gave. I want approval because of how much I've sacrificed." This is classic religion. Pray more and God will love you. Give more and God will love you. Do more good deeds and you will be accepted. You're a good person and so you'll go to heaven. All these ideas are classic in the human psyche. "I'm going to earn my way to God by showing him how good I am."

We're told that Cain's philosophy is rejected. So if you're like Cain, hoping that you are good enough for God, hoping that you've done enough good deeds and earned enough of his approval, there is no hope in that approach. You will be rejected by God. Good deeds won't get you into right standing with your creator. Cain illustrates that for us. But Abel comes with a different spirit. He is deeply aware that he cannot justify himself before God, so he doesn't try. Instead, his sacrifice is a humble statement of trust. He gives his first-born lamb and he gives it as an expression of reliance on God "God, I am not worthy. I rely wholly on you." And that offering is accepted. This teaches us something very important about faith.

Faith wagers on God's goodness.

In other words, faith bets, not on my own worthiness, but on God's goodness towards me. I'm not trusting in how good I've been. I reject any acceptance that I would receive because of my goodness and trust wholly on how good He is. The scripture illustrate this a number of different times, but my favorites are the two times that Jesus celebrates those of great faith in the New Testament.

One of them is when Jesus is approached by a Canaanite woman. We're told that she's a sinful woman that hasn't been living for God in any way. She comes to Jesus because her daughter is oppressed and needs to be healed. She appeals to Jesus, saying, "Jesus. Jesus. Will you heal my daughter?" Jesus' response is shocking. He doesn't even answer her. So she appeals again. And again he doesn't say anything, as if she didn't even talk. So she appeals again. And he still doesn't say anything. Then finally, he turns to her and says, "You know it isn't right to give the children's bread to dogs." ~~Of all the things he could have said, that wasn't gentle Jesus there.~~

How would you respond in that moment? "Did you just call me a dog? What?! I'm pretty good!" But this woman responds differently. She looks at Jesus and says, "Yes Lord, but even the dogs receive scraps from the master's table." He looks at her and says, "You just wagered on my goodness. Your daughter is healed." It was a test. Are you going to wager on your own righteousness or are you going to wager on the goodness of a God although you don't deserve it? That's what faith does.

Another example is when the Centurion comes to Jesus and says, "My servant is sick, would you heal him?" Jesus says, "Yes, I'll come to your home and I'll heal him." The Centurion says, "No. No. No. I am not worthy for you to come into my house. Just say the word and I believe that my servant will be healed if you just speak it." Jesus marvels and says, "I haven't seen such great faith in all of Israel." And the servant is healed at the very moment that Jesus says that, because the man had faith that wagered on the goodness of God. You have to place a bet. You have to wager, either on your own righteousness or on God's goodness. Where do you place your faith?

FAITH PRIORITIZES RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD ABOVE ALL

Verse 5 gives us the second example:

BY FAITH ENOCH WAS TAKEN UP SO THAT HE SHOULD NOT SEE DEATH AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD HAD TAKEN HIM. NOW, BEFORE HE WAS TAKEN HE WAS COMMENDED AS HAVING PLEASSED GOD. (HEBREWS 11:5)

If you know much about Enoch, you know that we don't know much about Enoch. There are only a couple of verses in the Bible that tell us anything about him. In fact, in those two verses we learn little other than the names of his kids, and that Enoch walked with God. Enoch walked closely with God and he's included in this list of people who had faith because he reveals something amazing about faith.

One theologian said that Enoch discovered friendship that even death could not interrupt. Consider that idea. What does that tell us about God? It tells us that God does not want you to treat him like a system or a routine, though this is often our natural inclination. For example, I've been teaching my boys to pray. And I have found that, as soon as they begin to understand prayer a little bit, they lock into one prayer and then, that's it. If I say, "Hey, will you pray for the food?" They say, "Sure, thank you God for this meal,

we love you so much Amen." "Thank you God for this meal, we love so much Amen." "Thank You God for this meal, we love you so much Amen." After awhile, I say to them, "Hold on a second. That's a good prayer, but you prayed it the last three hundred nights. Let's mix it up a bit. Let's say something from the heart." There's an inclination in all of us to make God just a routine, a system, a program. I blow through my prayers to God. I do my thing and that's supposed to initiate a blessing.

But God doesn't want you to treat him like a system. He wants you to treat him like a person. Take walks with God. Have conversations with God. Ask questions of God. Make it personal. What does it take? It takes a step of faith. For me, the most sacred thing in my life is my relationship with my creator and an ongoing dialogue with him. I love my wife. I love my kids. I love my church. But I love God in a way that doesn't compare to anything else in my life because it's personal to me. It's personal to me like the old hymn writer said, "He walks with me. He talks with me. He tells me that I am his own. And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known."

Do you have that? Do you know that? And if not, why not? What holds you back? Enoch pleased God. Why? **Because faith prioritizes relationship with God above all.**

Faith prioritizes relationship with God above all, just as faith wagers on God's goodness like Abel did. It's another angle of the diamond of faith: faith prioritizes relationship with God above all. Do you? Do you prioritize relationship with God above all? If you did, what would need to change?

FAITH SURRENDERS PERSONAL REPUTATION

Verse 7 gives us a third example of faith.

BY FAITH NOAH BEING WARNED BY GOD CONCERNING EVENTS AS YET UNSEEN, IN REVERENT FEAR CONSTRUCTED AN ARK FOR THE SAVING OF HIS HOUSEHOLD AND BY THIS HE CONDEMNED THE WORLD AND BECAME AN HEIR OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT COMES BY FAITH. (HEBREWS 11:7)

Here we are introduced to Noah and we're told that, by faith, he built a boat. In the original account, we learn that he is building the ark no where near a body of water and that building the ark took him decades. This wasn't a ten-day project or even a five-month one. This was a project that took years and years of his life. For all these years, he's known as the guy who is building a gigantic boat on a desert plain with no way to get it to the ocean. He's spending all of his money building a boat that will never float. This is the legacy that Noah carries for years.

Imagine that step of faith. Noah looked ridiculous for a considerable portion of his life. He looked ridiculous to the people around him. Can you imagine being Noah's kid in high school? Here you are, you don't have new shoes or a new backpack because your dad spent it all on a boat that is in the desert. That's not easy! Noah's entire life was defined by a project that made no sense to anyone around him. To them, he looked ridiculous.

I can imagine that the Apostle Paul also looked pretty ridiculous to the Pharisees when he decided to leave the prestigious religious institution of his day and invest his life in poor uneducated Christians. I bet he lost some reputation there. And I bet Peter had some heads turn when he abandoned his successful fishing business so that he could follow a man from Nazareth who said he was God. I bet he lost some

cred with his friends. And I bet that Joseph had some struggles when he told people about his great dream of rulership as he sat in a prison in Egypt. Joshua probably looked ridiculous when he said, "Hey guys, here's what we're going to do. We're going to circle around this city called Jericho a whole bunch of times until we are exhausted and then we're going to yell and the walls are going to come down. Does that sound like a God plan everybody?" Or David, as he steps forward to fight Goliath. This man could eat him for lunch. He has no hope here. He looks foolish. As we look through the chronicles of the scriptures, we find that people frequently looked foolish for God.

The life of Noah teaches us something specific about faith. It teaches us that faith has social implications. It always does. It impacts your standing in the community. Has your faith had some significant social implications? Has it meant that you don't go there? Has it meant that you don't do that? Has it meant that you invest here rather than there? Has it meant that you have to lose some friends? Has it meant that it impacted your reputation? If it is faith, it probably has because **faith surrenders personal reputation**.

It's another angle of the diamond of faith. Faith surrenders personal reputation. It means that you might lose some friends. It means that you might lose some status. It means that some of your family members may think you're self-righteous. Are you willing to surrender personal reputation? That is the journey of faith. And we're told in the text that if we do, we'll receive something better.

FAITH MAKES HIM SMILE

AND WITHOUT FAITH IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE HIM. FOR WHOEVER WHO DRAW NEAR TO GOD MUST BELIEVE THAT HE EXISTS AND THAT HE REWARDS THOSE WHO SEEK HIM.
(HEBREWS 11:6)

Without faith it's impossible to please God. That tells us something specific about God. That with faith, we can please him. That faith is pleasing to him. There's something inside of you that desires approval. It's in all of us. You want to please your spouse. You want to please your parents. You want to please your children. You want to please your coworkers or your boss. You want to please people. It's natural. It's human. It's just who you are. But even deeper than that, there is a desire inside of you and me, not just to please the people in our lives, but also to please God himself. Hardwired in you, there is an ache and a longing to please the creator of the universe. But the problem with that desire is that you and I are cognizant, to some level, of our own sin. We know that we're broken. We know that we're selfish. We know that we're proud. We know that we're lustful. Shame and guilt haunts us and tells us that we are not pleasing to God. Most often our response to that is to strive to do better, prove that we're good, and hopefully convince ourselves, on some level, that we are in fact a good person. But if you are honest, deep down you know that there's pride there, that there's fear there, that there's lust there, that there's greed there, and that there are elements of your soul that couldn't possibly be pleasing to God.

This is why Jesus came. Jesus came for this very specific reason. The book of Hebrews, and all of Chapter 11, and all of the stories in it point to Jesus. The examples that the writer uses are arrows pointing to the one who has done the unthinkable for us. Jesus is the true Noah. It's Jesus who rescues us from the flood of judgment by becoming an ark in which we can run into. Jesus is the true Enoch, who walked with the Father so perfectly, that God took him up and raised him from the dead. Jesus is the true Abel, the one who was betrayed by his brothers and dies as the sacrificial lamb that is acceptable to God. All of the stories, all of the answers, all of the issues, point back to the one who has done something incredible for us: Jesus!

What you need to see is that you are in a burning building on a third floor, and it is Jesus who has run into the building and it's Jesus who calls out to you and says, "I am strong enough to catch you and I will, but you have to become aware of my voice. You have to believe that I'm strong enough and then you've got to jump off that balcony into my arms." And if you will do that, something will happen. There will be a great exchange in the invisible world. The sin of your life will be washed away in the blood of Jesus and the righteous record of Jesus himself will be given freely to you, so that you're not just blameless, you're perfect in God's sight.

Favor from God cannot be earned, but it can be transferred. Ephesians Chapter 2 says:

BUT GOD BEING RICH IN MERCY BECAUSE OF THE GREAT LOVE WITH WHICH HE LOVED US, EVEN WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN OUR TRESPASSES AND OUR SINS, MADE US ALIVE TOGETHER WITH CHRIST BY GRACE. (EPHESIANS 2: 4-5)

Grace means undeserved, unearned favor from God. "By grace" he raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. By his undeserved, unearned, unmerited grace you are saved through faith: through an awareness and then a conviction and then an action. You are saved through faith and this is not your own doing. It is a gift. It is a gift from God. Your whole life, God has been trying to teach you a new way of thinking, a new way of considering, a new way of living. Like a father who's trying to teach his son or daughter to walk. He's trying to teach you to take a step: wager on his goodness, prioritize relationship with him, and sacrifice reputation. Then take another step: wager on his goodness, prioritize relationship with him, and sacrifice reputation. And every time you take a step in his direction, something incredible happens. **You make him smile.**

Your own merits cannot please God. Your own righteousness cannot earn his acceptance. But your faith makes God smile. Every time you trust him. Every time you place a bet on his goodness. Every time you make relationship with Him the most important thing in your life. Every time you say, "God if I look like a fool to follow you I'll still follow." Every time you take a step of faith, it makes him smile.

Your heart longs to please God and here's how: every step of faith.

Faith is a living bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it. – Martin Luther

A STEP OF FAITH

What step of faith stands in front of you right now? Maybe there are many steps, but pray that God would help you focus on one.

- **Maybe your step of faith is to trust God for the right relationship in his time.**
Perhaps you started off with high standards in the relationship department. You said, "This person is going to love Jesus. They're going to follow God. They're going to be a spiritual leader." Time has gone by and now you just say, "Does he have a pulse?" ~~Maybe your step of faith is to get those standards back up, to believe that He has someone for you at the right time, in the right way.~~
- **Or maybe you're step of faith is to trust God financially.**
Maybe your situation doesn't make sense and you say, "We're no longer going to be generous. We're not going to risk." ~~And your step of faith moment is to say, "Even if it doesn't make sense, we're going to trust God and wager on his goodness."~~
- **Maybe your step of faith is to share your faith.**
There's somebody in your life and you know that God's been knocking on the door of your heart to share your story of faith with them, but you haven't because you're afraid to risk your reputation.

What is your step of faith today? Where do you need to trust God right now?

When the step is clear in your mind, take it. Take this step of faith. In your heart say, "I'm going to trust you God. I know you're there. I believe you're good. I trust you'll catch me when I jump."

Can you see Him smiling?