**Small Group Sermon Study Guide**

Moving God’s Story Forward: (1) By Faith

**Hebrews 11:4-12** 4/15/12 **A.M.**

1) Martin Luther King Jr once said, “Faith is taking the first step even when you don’t see the whole

staircase.” Is there an area in your life where you are taking a first step without seeing

the whole staircase? Share.

2) “For anyone who comes to God must believe that he exists and rewards those who seek him.”

Faith is not the same thing as absolute certainty. But faith is plausible. Faith has its reasons.

In his book ***Faith and Doubt,*** John Ortberg says, “I believe there is a God for a pile of reasons:

Dreams, arguments, banana cream pie, umpires, *Hotel Rwanda,* complicated telephone mailbox systems, Little Nell, the happiness pill, and one other reason, one reason that trumps every other reasons and leaves them all in the dust.”

On the quote sheet, those reasons are developed a bit more. Take a look at the sheet.

Which of Ortberg’s reasons seems most convincing to you? Which seems least convincing?

3) *He rewards those who seek him.*

Some rewards are intrinsic to a pursuit and some rewards are extrinsic. An example of an

intrinsic reward: If a man is seeking a woman and she finally agrees to his proposal then her

“yes” is his reward. It is the proper fulfillment of his quest. Extrinsic rewards are not connected

To the pursuit itself. The man who hikes the Grand Canyon for the reward of a hot pizza upon

Finishing, is pursuing a reward that is not at all connected to the hike itself. (Getting great

pictures would be a reward connected to the hike itself.)

Do you think the reward of faith is an intrinsic reward or an extrinsic one? Explain.

4) *“When warned about things not seen”*

When God warned Noah about a flood, his faith in that warning prompted him to build a boat.

Faith acts on God’s promises and on God’s warnings.

Read the following warning passages:

Luke 12:13-21

Matthew 12:33-37

John 15:18-25

What are steps we can take right now to act on the warnings Jesus gives in those passages?

5) *He was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God.*

Faith moves God’s story forward because we trust in the same God who is building the city that

lasts. God will establish our faith prompted works of service. (See 2 Thess 1:11-12)

In that light, what act of service is God calling you to do right now…in your family…

your church...your job…your community?

***Quote Sheet***

***Faith Has It’s Reasons from John Ortberg’s book Faith and Doubt***

Reason 1: Dreams

You might be a butterfly dreaming you are a man. You cannot prove otherwise. But it

is sensible to disbelieve you are a butterfly and to believe you are a human being. To believe you are a man and not a butterfly helps you live your life. It is a basic conviction.

In the same way to believe in God is a basic conviction which enables me to live my life.

Reason 2: Arguments

Arguments are everywhere. On television, internet, and out on the street. Most arguments

depend on the assumption that moral reality is built into the way life is. Whenever we say, “That’s not right! That’s unfair!” we appeal to a moral order that is higher than us and judges all of us by the same standard.

A moral order points to a Moral Orderer. Arguments appealing to standards point to a

God of standards.

Reason 3: Banana Cream Pie

This world is full of good things like banana cream pie. It is unreasonable to believe

good things come by chance and we just happen to enjoy them. Good gifts point to a good giver. Banana cream pie points to an Outrageously Good God.

Reason 4: Umpires

In our heart of hearts we don’t just want things to work out for us alone. We also want

Evil-doers to be judged and punished, given their just deserts. Most people

abhor the idea that child abuse or rape could be labeled a personal preference. We want it judged as wrong. Our demand for justice tells us there must be a judge.

Reason 5: Hotel Rwanda

This movie tells about how during one year in the 1990’s a million people were destroyed in

Rwanda just for belonging to the wrong tribe. If the universe is an accident there is no

Way we can call this atrocity evil. It is just another random event. If we call the events

in Rwanda evil however then we act as if this is a moral universe. Why? The Christian

reason has lots of explanatory power. We feel outrage at evil because we are made in

image of a good and righteous God.

Reason 6: Telephone Mailbox Systems

Ortberg shares about a phone call to a genuinely nice person. He was using speaker phone to

leave the message and after he hung up, he spoke mocking words about this nice person to someone else. Then he heard a dial tone come over the loudspeaker. The nice person would hear all his ugly words. Ortberg said, “I had no one else to blame”.

And we agree. Such behavior is worthy of blame and so is much of our own behavior.

We do not blame animals for their behavior. We do not say they are culpable for their

wrongdoing but humans are. And that points to God.

Reason 7: The Happiness Pill

The existence of joy points toward God. Joy is different than happiness. Ortberg illustrates this

by engaging in a little thought experiment. Suppose you could take a pill that would put you into a permanent coma but you would have thrilling dreams, uninterrupted happiness surges. Would you take the pill? No!

We want an actual full-bodied experience of nature, music, people and God himself. Joy is the

Pleasure of spiritual meaning. All spiritual meanings require life everlasting with God.

**Reason 8: The Best, Biggest Reason for Believing**

**Jesus is trustworthy and Jesus clearly believed in God. This belief propelled Jesus into a life of**

**amazing love. His love changed so many peoples’ lives then and now. Jesus supplies**

**people with abundant meaning to live based on his news that the living God is also**

**good and loving. A belief in a meaningless universe doesn’t supply people with meaning or hope to change their lives.**