

The Rest of the Story: Walking by Faith Changes Everything Hebrews 11:8-19

Northwest Community Church, Todd Havekost, 11/26/2023

Introduction: "The Rest of the Story"

I remember a long-running radio program that was popular many years ago.¹ The 5-minute segments started off telling the story of a person who appeared to be in a hopeless or helpless situation. One episode told of a young boy named Marian who was frequently bullied as he walked home from school.

As the story unfolded, facts that weren't initially apparent were brought to light that began to change the outlook. In this episode, a man at a fire station who had observed Marian being bullied pulled him aside one day and began teaching him how to defend himself.

As the segment concluded, an unexpected outcome was revealed. Marian grew up to be the famous actor John Wayne whose characters epitomized strength that overcame evil. And Paul Harvey concluded these programs with his trademark tagline, "and now you know ... the rest of the story."

For the Christian who walks by faith there too is always more going on than meets the eye. There are eternal realities that bring new perspectives, particularly to situations that at first glance appear bleak or difficult. They fill in "the rest of the story."

The New Testament uses a variety of images to remind us to live with this eternal perspective. Colossians 3:2 exhorts us "**set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.**"

Philippians 3:20 reminds us "**we are citizens of heaven.**"² Corinthians 5:7 says, "**for we walk by faith, not by sight.**"

And Galatians 2:20 says "**I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.**" When we live by faith it is as if Jesus is living out His life through us.

- No wonder Jesus told us to love one another as He loves us (John 13:34).
- No wonder Paul told the Ephesians to forgive one another as God forgave us (Eph 4:32).
- No wonder Paul told the Romans to accept one another as Jesus accepted us (Rom 15:7).

Jesus living in me by faith, indeed that changes everything.

"Walking by faith" or "living by faith" are common ways the New Testament expresses this way of living.² In our passage today, Hebrews 11:8-19, we will see a great example of a person who walked by faith, Abraham, and gain insights into the perspectives that enabled him to live that way.

The Christian life begins with faith and continues with faith. As Romans 3 explains, every one of us had a "righteousness deficit." We were completely lacking our own righteousness, a truly helpless and hopeless situation.

But beginning with verse 21 another Paul (not the radio host, but the apostle) proclaimed "the rest of the story." "**But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested ... even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ**

¹ The program ran from 1976 through 2009.

² 5 occurrences are Rom. 1:17, 2 Cor. 5:7, Gal 2:20 and 3:11, and Heb. 10:38.

Jesus" (Rom. 3:21-24). The moment we believed Jesus for His promise of eternal life, we were justified, declared righteous by God. At that moment we went from having zero righteousness to having the infinite righteousness of Jesus credited to us.

"Justified as a gift by His grace" is one of the most joyfully redundant verses in the Bible. We are justified as a gift by God's freely bestowed giving favor. Paul repeats Himself to ensure we don't miss that being justified is God's free gracious gift.

And now, having been justified by faith, we are called to continue in that same faith, to live by faith, to walk by faith. We saw this continuity of beginning as a Christian by faith and continuing as a Christian by faith a few weeks ago as we studied through Galatians 3. **"This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"** (Gal. 3:2-3)

And Colossians 2:6 makes the same point. **"Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord [by faith], so walk in Him [by faith]."**

Background of Hebrews

The broader context of our passage today in Hebrews is that the readers were experiencing intense persecution from intolerant Jews. They were tempted to turn back from full-hearted Christianity into a safe observance of Judaism.

As we were reminded two weeks ago, in your face persecution is a very present reality for much of the church around the world today. Some violent opposition is inspired by enmity from other religions,³ as here in Hebrews. Other intense persecution arises

from governments seeking to maintain strict control over their residents.⁴

This opposition can also be expected to prevail in various less obvious less violent forms in any culture including our own. As Jesus told His disciples in the upper room, **"if the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you"** (John 15:18).

The same demonically inspired and empowered world system that arranged to have the only perfectly loving person who ever lived sentenced to death is still very much running the show. Presenting Jesus as the only way and following Jesus are not going to be in favor. We should expect to encounter opposition from the prevailing culture. As followers of Jesus, we live in "enemy-occupied territory."

And so it was for the recipients of the book of Hebrews. The Jewish-driven persecution seen throughout the book of Acts (as originally led by Saul) continued in their experience.

In the latter part of Hebrews 10 the author reminded his readers that they had already **"... endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated"** (10:32b-33). In some cases they had been directly attacked, in other cases they suffered by choosing to stand with those who were being attacked.

"For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one" (10:34). Losing their earthly things didn't devastate them because they

³ Current examples include from Muslims in Africa, Hindus in India, and Buddhists in the Far East.

⁴ As imposed today by Communists in China and elsewhere and Islamic regimes across the Middle East.

knew "the rest of the story," that they had treasure laid up in heaven they could never lose.

"Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward" (10:35). Despite their past victories (for which God would reward them), they faced continual temptation and pressure:

- To shrink back and "stop rocking the boat" with their following of Jesus;
- To conform to the observance of Judaism that they grew up with and fit in again with their families and friends;
- To avoid difficulty by abandoning the challenging path of faith; and
- To retreat to "safer" ways of living.

Thus the author continues **"for you have need of endurance so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what [God's reward] was promised ... But My righteous one shall live by faith" (10:36, 38a).**

When we encounter adversity, the need of the moment, for the Hebrews and for us, is endurance, to steadfastly continue to live by faith, to walk by faith.

To help inspire his readers (and us) the author sets before us in Hebrews 11 many great Old Testament examples who have blazed this path before us. He introduces these examples by describing the nature of this faith that we live by and the approval from God associated with living in this manner.

Hebrews 11:1-2

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see (11:1, NIV).

Faith is being sure and certain about ...

- **"What we hope for"** - faith anticipates an incredibly positive future, one that reflects the plan and promises of our incredibly gracious God. "Hope" is Scripture does not refer to something I wish will happen, but on God's good outcome I can anticipate with utter certainty.

And **faith is being sure and certain** about ...

- **"What we do not see"** - faith operates in the realm of the unseen. But it is not a "blind" faith, it is not a "leap in the dark." Try telling the eleven disciples they had a "blind" faith after they had interacted with the risen Jesus. Instead, it is firmly grounded on events that occurred in "space and time"⁵ including creation (to which the author refers in v. 3⁶; see also Rom. 1:20) and the historically substantiated resurrection of Jesus.

The person who walks by faith operates with settled certainty of a glorious future on the basis of God's revealed, eternal truths. This is a certainty that is primarily derived outside the realm of the five physical senses. To the person who walks by faith, the unseen realities of God are as real as anything we see or touch.

To the person who walks by faith, facts such as

- Knowing I have eternal life that I can never lose;
- God will never forsake me; and
- God will use any adversity to transform my character when I depend on Him

Are just as sure and just as certain as the fact that I am wearing a blue shirt today.

For by it the men of old gained approval (11:2).

⁵ Francis Schaeffer's landmark 1972 book Genesis in Space and Time greatly influenced my development in college.

⁶ "Only by faith can we know that the world was created by a word from God. From the beginning, then, there is this principle that we must depend on what God has revealed rather than on what we can see" (J. Paul Tanner, Grace NT Commentary, p. 1079).

The one who lives by faith gains the approval of God, His "well done." "Approval" here is the same root word that is repeated:

- In verse 4 of Abel ("**obtained the testimony**");
- In verse 5 of Enoch ("**obtained the witness**"); and
- In the summary statement of the chapter in verse. 39, "**all these, having gained approval [by God] through their faith, did not receive what was promised.**"⁷

And verse 6 picks up this same theme again, now switching back to the word "reward."

Hebrews 11:6

And without faith it is impossible to please Him ... (11:6a)

We too can also be part of this great group of people who gain God's approval, who please Him. But the only way to do that is to live by faith.

... for he who comes to God [the one who draws near to God] must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him (11:6b).

Two of these unseen "hoped for" realities upon which the person who walks by faith operates are that (1) God exists and (2) "**He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.**" This is at least the seventh reference in the verses we have already seen that the one who walks by faith pleases God, gains God's reward, gains God's approval. The person who draws near to God is spurred on by the knowledge that one essential aspect of how God operates is that He rewards such people. This is a primary motivator that sustains the one who walks by faith when he faces inevitable adversity.

⁷ And in verse 7 we find yet another expression of this same idea indicating that Noah "**became an heir**" through his faithful obedience preparing the ark.

And this will also be a dominant theme in the life of Abraham, to which we now turn in verse 8.

Hebrews 11:8-9

By faith⁸ Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going (11:8).

The first manifestation of walking by faith in Abraham's life was his leaving his familiar and prosperous existence in Ur⁹ to go to an unknown place that God called him to. The Bible says Abraham was very rich¹⁰, so we should have an image of him living in a big compound with lots of comforts when he received God's call to go out.

By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs¹¹ of the same promise (11:9).

In verse 9 we see a second indication of Abraham's walking by faith, that even when Abraham arrived at the promised land, he still lived as an alien, a foreigner¹², as a nomad in tents. He was not able to settle down in permanent dwellings on land he could call his own. Keep in mind the contrast from his earlier stationary prosperous surroundings.

⁸ Note the powerful repetitive structure of "by faith" (or "by it" directly referencing faith), which appears 20 times in chapter 11.

⁹ Abraham was originally called when living in Ur (Gen. 15:7) but was residing in Haran when the primary narrative of Genesis 12 commences.

¹⁰ "**Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold**" (Gen 13:2).

¹¹ Just as Noah's faithful obedience in building the ark enabled him to become an heir (v. 7), so Abraham was promised to receive an inheritance (v. 8) and he (along with Isaac and Jacob) were fellow heirs of that promise (v. 9). As we recently studied in Galatians 5, "becoming an heir" or "receiving an inheritance" are additional descriptions commonly used in Scripture to express God's reward for faithful living.

¹² As reflected in Abraham's self-description at the time of Sarah's death, "**I am a foreigner and stranger among you**" (Gen 23:4a, NIV).

Note that verse 10 interrupts the "by faith" word pattern beginning the verses and instead begins "for", explaining the reason for his actions. What led Abraham to make his courageous and counter-cultural steps of faith?

Hebrews 11:10-12

For he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God (11:10).

As referenced in both verses 8 and 9, one of God's primary promises to Abraham that He repeated at least three times¹³ was to give him the land of Canaan "for an everlasting possession." And yet as glorious a promise as that was, even that earthly land was not where Abraham placed his ultimate hope. No, he was looking ahead expectantly for "the [heavenly] city" of the age to come, made by God.¹⁴

Abraham accepted and acted on God's promises without any tangible sign they would be fulfilled. Notice the contrasts between Abraham's current experience and what he was looking for expectantly in the future.

- Currently he was wandering in the wilderness with exposure to enemies and elements, but he was looking ahead to "the city."
- Currently his living arrangements were nomadic and transitory, but he was looking ahead to having "foundations" implying permanence.
- Currently he was living in common tents, but he was looking ahead to lodging designed and built by God.

By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised (11:11).

A third manifestation of Sarah and Abraham walking by faith is believing that God would grant them a son despite their old age. This is another great example of what walking by faith looks like, placing her confidence in what is not seen (God's repeated promises) rather than what is seen (her being 90 and Abraham being 100 years old).

We should note, Abraham and Sarah's faith was far from perfect, they had numerous lapses in faith. Walking by faith isn't a matter of our being perfect, but instead it means depending on God who is perfectly reliable to fulfill every one of His promises in Scripture.

Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, and INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE (11:12).

God promised at least three times that Abraham would have a multitude of descendants,¹⁵ to such an extent as captured in the memorable images of as many "as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore" (Gen. 22:17).

At the time the book of Hebrews was written, its readers could see a lot of evidence God was fulfilling this promise. But what about Abraham himself, the person to whom God made the promise?

Hebrews 11:13

All these [Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob] died in faith, without receiving the promises ... (11:13a).

¹³ Genesis 12:7; 13:14-15; 17:8

¹⁴ This verse along with verse 16 suggest this is the "new Jerusalem" referred to in Rev. 21:2, 9-27.

¹⁵ Genesis 15:5; 17:4; 22:17

Brenda and I enjoy watching good drama, which typically involves a great deal of adversity and turmoil during the story, twists and turns, ups and downs. But we are very invested in happy endings. For us, if a movie does not have a happy ending it is immediately disqualified from the "we might watch this again someday" list.

Abraham died without receiving what God promised him.

- God promised Abraham "I will make you into a great nation" (Gen 12:2). At the time of his death, he and Sarah were parents of a single child.
- God promised Abraham "In you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen 12:3). There was no hint of that occurring.
- God promised Abraham "I will give this land to your descendants" (Gen 12:7). When he died, he was wandering in the land in tents as a foreigner.
- God promised Abraham "I will greatly multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore" (Gen 22:17). He died with literally only a handful of descendants.

If Abraham's bucket list consisted of seeing the answers to God's promises, he would be a deeply disappointed man, 0 for 4. He gave up so much, and yet died without receiving the promises. It appears he was mistaken, misguided, a person to feel sorry for rather than admired and emulated.

If that was the end of verse 13 and Abraham's death was the end of the story, it would be indeed a very sad ending. But that's not the end of verse 13.

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and welcomed them from a distance ... (11:13a,b).

All these "**died in faith**", they continued to walk by faith to the very end of their lives, because they were "**sure of what they hoped for and certain of what they did not see**" (11:1). Their hopes were on far higher fulfillments than the pleasures and comforts of this life.¹⁶ They understood and embraced God's promises. They took bold, life-disrupting steps of faith driven by those promises. And with "eyes of faith" they realized that they would not personally experience most of the blessings of those promises during their lifetimes.

Verse 13 concludes "**and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth**" (11:13c).

This makes explicit what has been implied up to this point. A driving force to their living out this life of faith was that they did not consider earth "home." They were not citizens of earth. Their earthly lives were not the only story, they were not even the main story. They desired to be faithful to God's commands and purposes working in and through them.

This is not just the case for Abraham (& Sarah & Isaac & Jacob), this is the perspective all of us who walk by faith need to have, "for God's ultimate promises are not meant to be realized in this life."¹⁷ The author concludes the chapter on this same theme, applying this deferral of promises to everyone described in the chapter. "**And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised**" [in this life] (Heb. 11:39).

Hebrews 11:14-16

¹⁶ C.S. Lewis memorably put it this way. "It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased (The Weight of Glory).

¹⁷ Tanner, p. 1081.

For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return (11:14-15).

Jesus used the word translated “country” [patrida] here when he said **“a prophet has no honor in his own country”**, his homeland (Jn 4:44).

If Abraham regarded Ur as his true homeland, he could have gone back. If Abraham regarded Canaan as his true homeland, he would not have described himself there at the end of his life as **“a foreigner and stranger among you”** (Gen 23:4a, NIV).

It is a common and recurring temptation for the "foreigner and stranger" living out the walk of faith and facing spiritual warfare and opponents of the cross to shrink back.

- The Israelites on their way to the Promised Land were repeatedly tempted to return to Egypt.
- This was precisely the temptation that was the occasion for the entire book of Hebrews. The readers were tempted to turn back from following Jesus that generated huge opposition into a safe observance of Judaism.

And we too will be repeatedly tempted to shrink back from a bold walk of faith, to shrink back from living counter-culturally:

- at our jobs or schools;
- in the way we raise our families;
- in our neighborhoods;
- in how we manage our material resources

To shrink back into a lifestyle that largely conforms to this world’s values.

But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one (11:16a)

The homeland Abraham and the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 had in their sights was a heavenly one. They were indeed “citizens of heaven.” For them indeed “heaven changes everything.”

Verse 16 concludes **“therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them”** (11:16b).

“Not ashamed” is a figure of speech¹⁸ indicating that God is extremely pleased with those who have set their hearts on and oriented their lives around heaven. And He has prepared a city for them, as already mentioned in verse 10 **“the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”**

The reality behind the repeated references to "city" (vs. 10, 16) and "country" (vs 14, 15, 16) in these verses is now explicitly stated to be a heavenly one, namely they were looking ahead to the new heaven and new earth, as described in Revelation 21 and 22.

Hebrews 11:17-19

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac (11:17a).

We have already seen 3 major expressions of walking by faith in Abraham’s life:

- Going out from familiar Ur to an unknown place
- Living as an alien and nomad in Canaan
- Believing God for a son despite he and Sarah being very old

Now a fourth (and huge) manifestation of Abraham walking by faith was obeying God’s command to offer up Isaac.

¹⁸ Litotes, e.g., expressing approval of a job well done by exclaiming "not bad!".

And he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED" (11:17b-18).

Our initial response to this situation tends to be seeing it as a conflict between Abraham's love for his son and his duty to God. And that surely represented a big part of the challenge.

But the emphasis in these verses is on Abraham's difficulty in reconciling this command with the promises God had previously made to him. Verse 18 reminds us God had explicitly told Abraham (in Gen. 21:12) His promises would be fulfilled through Isaac. But now God was telling him to give up that promise-fulfilling son.

He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead (11:19a).

Here we learn that Abraham's ability to obey this faith-testing command was one more manifestation of his walking by faith. He was certain God would fulfill His promises, if not in the manner he originally expected, then through some other means, such as God raising Isaac back up from the dead.

From which he also received him back as a type (11:19b).

Isaac rising from the altar (once God rescinded the command) was a "type", a figure, an illustration just as if he had risen from the dead. This is another example of many in this passage where the evidence of Abraham walking by faith is seen as he again looks beyond death.¹⁹

Because of the promises of God, the person who walks by faith looks beyond death.

- Death isn't the end of the story.

¹⁹ "Abraham ... lived life in light of his ultimate destiny in the eternal city of God. Because of this perspective, his faith evidenced itself in ways that looked beyond death" (Tanner, p. 1082).

- Death isn't the ultimate outcome to avoid.
- As Paul put it in Philippians 1, "**to me, to live is Christ, to die is gain.**"
- That is an easy verse to quote, a hard verse to live out.

I was personally very challenged recently as I reread Safely Home, a fictional novel by Randy Alcorn. The two main characters in the story are:

- "Quan", a Christian in China living faithfully for Jesus despite far-reaching oppressive government persecution that continually threatens his and his family's well-being and even their lives; and
- An American businessman "Ben", who was his friend and roommate in an American college 20 years ago

Throughout the book American "Ben" grapples with trying to get his head around Quan's repeated choices that value living faithfully for Jesus as being far more important than avoiding poverty and danger and imprisonment and death. While immersed in the book I was continually challenged because my gut reactions to situations that unfolded in the story were more closely aligned with Ben's "it's not worth the risk" values than Quan's "I have decided in advance to follow Jesus and I will not shrink back from that no matter the blowback."

Walking by Faith

As we near the end, let's think a little more together about possible characteristics of a lifestyle of walking by faith.

If I believe that I am God's servant and soldier in a cosmic battle with the "**spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places**" in which only God's power can prevail (Eph. 6:11); if I believe that apart from Jesus I can do nothing (John 15:5), if I believe I do not have because I do not ask (Jam. 4:2), then I will realize the most impactful thing I can do in any situation is to pray.

- I will pray frequently for God to work powerfully in and through the people He has brought into my life.

- In any activity in which I am involved I will pray first for God to work powerfully and then I will "do" the actions He calls me to do.
- I will recognize to act without first calling on God's power is like walking onto a modern battlefield with a BB gun.

One way this dependence of God's power might express itself is to pray each morning that I will walk by faith in the good works God has prepared for me (Eph. 2:10)

- By this I am affirming that He is leading and initiating, and I am following and responding.
- Then if at some point during the day I find myself responding with anxiety, frustration, anger
- That tells me I have veered off the path He is leading on
- And I will seek to reset and get back on the path of walking by faith in the good works He prepared.

Secondly, I will draw near to God in adversity. One of major themes of the New Testament (James 1, Romans 5) is how God uses adversity to transform our character, to mature us in ways and to extents that rarely happen when things are going smoothly. One indicator of walking by faith is that as we encounter adversity rather than responding in negative ways we draw near to God and embrace how He wants to change us as we walk through the challenge with Him.

I've had the privilege in recent years to observe and hear reports of several next generation young adults who have faced and are facing mega-levels of adversity in major life areas like health and marriage and children and injustice. As we know, adversity often leads people to lose it and lash out against God and others near to them.

But with maturity far beyond their years these young adults are drawing near to God and casting themselves on His care and depending on Him to keep them whole. I believe that through

these experiences God is expediting their development in maturity and as a result raising up some mighty warriors for His church. I can't wait to see the impact these young adults have in the coming years as they continue to walk by faith on this tough path

As we conclude let's use words from a great passage in 2 Corinthians 4 to pull together much of what we have seen today.

2 Corinthians 4:16

Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day (4:16).

Life and adversity may take its toll on our bodies and our health. Many of our dreams in this life may be unlikely to be realized. But as we walk by faith we don't lose heart, we are sure of what we hope for.

Because God always wins, He always accomplishes His purposes through His dependent servants.

And He is transforming us day by day into servants through whom He can show the greatness of His power.

2 Corinthians 4:17

For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison (4:17).

Eyes of faith understand that the glory and magnitude of God's eternal reward for faithful service will make whatever affliction we encounter in this life seem trivial by comparison.

2 Corinthians 4:18

While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal (4:18).

Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

As we walk by faith we live by and are carried along by God's unseen, eternal realities.

Those truths are as real to us as anything we see or touch.

Those realities give us great comfort, great purpose, great encouragement, great impact, no matter what.

That is truly "the rest of the story."

Indeed heaven changes everything.

Appendix: Kenton vs. Linkwood

Ten years ago, Brenda and I had a fire that gutted our house on Linkwood Street and caused us to have to live in a rental house for several months while our home was being restored. Some aspects of that experience might be helpful in thinking through some of the implications of living as "citizens of heaven".

Shortly after the fire (after interim housing was lovingly offered and provided by multiple church families) we relocated to a house we would rent for the six months it was going to take to restore our house. So we found ourselves living at Kenton.

Kenton was a very acceptable housing situation, we had a roof over our head, plenty of living space, air conditioning and heating, working appliances, a small yard for our puppies, a good landlord, and it was located close to where I worked and where our son was living.

With all the positives I listed, did you notice one word that I did not use to describe Kenton? "Home." We were "just passing through" at Kenton; Linkwood was "home". We were "citizens" of Linkwood; we were "pilgrims" at Kenton.

(1) Identification and allegiance as citizens of heaven

One lesson from our Kenton situation relates to identification and allegiance. I resisted sending "change of address" notices with the Kenton address to companies with which we did business because I self-identified Linkwood as our home address. Kenton was just the place where we were temporarily residing. I only mailed a few change of address notifications and those were sent reluctantly for items that the Post Office would no longer forward.

We all have many sources of identification and types of allegiances, e.g., ethnicity, nationality, state of residence, neighborhood or school district, economic standing, profession or class of employment, political party. But these are all far secondary to our primary identity as citizens of heaven:

- As those who are deeply beloved sons and daughters of God;
- As those who possess eternal life, who are experiencing the abundance of that life now and who have a certain and glorious future in heaven.

(2) Focus and investments of energies and resources in God's Kingdom

Another aspect of living at Kenton that can help inform the concept of being "citizens of heaven" pertains to the focus and investments of our energies and resources. While we were living at Kenton, we did not improve the property or paint the walls, we did not completely unpack to fill cupboards and storage shelves. We kept things clean and in order and maintained the property to leave it in good condition, but that was the extent of it.

Even though we were living at Kenton, our energies and resources were "invested" heavily in Linkwood. Almost every day we had some activity pertaining to improvements at Linkwood scheduled when we got home from work. We travelled to numerous appointments to make decisions and selections concerning brick, paint colors, flooring, lighting fixtures, window coverings, etc.

(3) Context for inevitable affliction living in a fallen world
Another lesson from living at Kenton provides context for the inevitable affliction that comes from living in a fallen world. We were very thankful to have suitable housing arrangements at Kenton. But there were some aspects of living there that were difficult.

For one, the water was very hard, leaving deposits in bowls and toilets and making laundry very challenging. Also, in the last few weeks of our time at Kenton ants took over one of the upstairs bathrooms. They started coming out in force from the drains in the sink and bathtub. No matter what we did we could not decisively defeat them. We ended up abandoning that bathroom and going downstairs to use another one.

These "hardships" were discouraging at times, but not overwhelmingly so, because Kenton wasn't "home", we were just "strangers and exiles" there. Ultimately, we would be home at Linkwood, where the water would be soft, where ants wouldn't take over a bathroom

We live in a thoroughly broken and fallen world. Our hearts are corrupted and permeated by sin, extending to thought, word and deed. There is so much physical and emotional pain and affliction. Even our best relationships in this world can be hurtful and deep connection can seem fleeting. The ruin extends past humanity to the entire creation, which is chronically plagued by disasters and epidemics and tragedies.

Paul writes in Romans 8 **"the creation was subjected to futility ... the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now"** (8:20, 22). In the Chronicles of Narnia C. S. Lewis pictures this by writing that the White Witch (symbolizing the devil) has a hold on Narnia that makes the whole world "always winter but never Christmas."

But one day God will make everything right. In that same Romans 8 passage Paul looks forward to the day when **"the creation itself will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God"** (Rom. 8:21).

So with this understanding of the brokenness of this world and God's ultimate re-creation, we do not lose heart when tragedy

strikes or when experiencing major adversity that may continue without relief for years. And we are delivered from the disappointment and despair that accompanies the expectation that everything in this life will be fixed.

(4) Citizens of heaven eagerly anticipate their future home

A final observation from our temporary housing situation at Kenton is that we looked forward with eager anticipation to what it was going to be like to be home at Linkwood. Most of the construction project involved infrastructure repairs, but some aspects resulted in changes in functionality and appearance. We made numerous trips to Linkwood to see how the new brick and siding selections looked from the street and how changes in a remodeled bathroom were progressing.

Knowing that Kenton was not "home" didn't lead us to become inactive couch potatoes. It led to extensive investments of time and resources in the cause and values of our future home, producing improvements we would not experience at Kenton but would enjoy for years beginning at a future time when we moved "home" to Linkwood. We were extremely invested in the home Lenz Contractors was preparing for us.

This sense of eager anticipation is front and center in Phil. 3:20. **"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body"** (NIV). This "eager waiting" is the same root word as we saw in Heb. 11:10 where Abraham was **"looking for the city which has foundations."**

As citizens of heaven, we eagerly await our homecoming when at death (or when Jesus returns) we will pass immediately into God's glorious presence. And we further eagerly await the return of our

Savior when He will give us resurrected bodies fully suited for life on a new earth, where creation will be fully restored and all God's original purposes for creation and man introduced in the Garden of Eden will be fulfilled. [Note: If your concept of your future life in the new heaven and new earth doesn't generate that "holy anticipation", I heartily recommend Randy Alcorn's book Heaven.]