

Session 4: Faith

QUESTION 1:

What are some examples of things that are unseen but reliable?

THE POINT

We can confidently trust in what God says and does.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

It is hard to know what to believe anymore. The Internet is filled with “news” on topics that range from politics to medicine to conspiracies, and all the writers tout their stories as truth—even though the “facts” they present contradict each other. If you doubt what you read, someone will offer this jewel: “It may sound hard to believe, but just accept it as true. Take it on faith.”

Really?

Is faith just jumping blindly into something we want to be true—or is it something more? Throughout the Bible, we see a whole different idea of faith. The writer of Hebrews captured the essence of faith in a single chapter. In Hebrews 11, we see individuals whose faith was grounded in something solid: A faithful God who could be fully trusted.

Let’s embrace a different understanding of faith from what the world describes. Faith is not believing something without substance. Hebrews 11 shows us real life examples of people who faced overwhelming situations and expressed a faith grounded in God.



WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

HEBREWS 11:1-3

¹ Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen. ² For by it our ancestors won God's approval. ³ By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

Since the Christian life is a life of faith, let's be very clear on what faith is. Verse 1 describes how faith works and what it does.

- 1. Faith gives us confidence.** Faith has substance. It is an assurance based on the reality of what God has done and said.
- 2. Faith is an inward conviction.** We trust God and know He will do what He says He will do—because He always does.

QUESTION 2:

What helps you have faith in God even though you can't see Him?

Want an example? Let's start at the beginning with the creation of the universe. The universe is here for us to touch, see, and explore. Yet for all we have learned and keep learning about creation, science simply can't answer the most fundamental questions about its existence. While we would all agree the universe exists, not everyone knows why and how it came to exist. Is the universe merely a giant cosmic accident or is there some purpose or plan?

Christians know the answers to the "why" and "how" questions because of our faith. "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God." God spoke, and we take Him at His word. That is faith.

By studying nature, we can understand some things about the Person of God; in the same way, studying a great work of art will tell us something about the artist. The early church fathers considered nature the second "book" of God. Consider then what God's "work of art"—the universe—tells us about Him.

- ▶ The massive size and scope of the universe points to God, who is all-powerful.
- ▶ The details in nature and the intricacies of our own bodies point to God, who has infinite wisdom.
- ▶ The constant laws of the universe point to God, who is constant and unchanging.

As we understand God was faithful in the beginning in His work of creation, we then can believe He will be faithful to the future of His creation.

To highlight his point, the writer of Hebrews reminded us God made everything from nothing: "what is seen was made from things that are not visible." God spoke and the universe came to be. The powerful creative work of God does not contradict scientific evidence. Faith—that firm conviction in what God said—points us to the "why" behind all that scientific evidence: *God spoke*.

God began with nothing and brought all that exists into being from nothing. We can be confident and have faith that God will continue to work His will in our world—and in our lives.

HEBREWS 11:4

⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was approved as a righteous man, because God approved his gifts, and even though he is dead, he still speaks through his faith.

After the writer described *faith* in verses 1-3, he gave us several examples of those who demonstrated such faith. He provided a list of people who responded to God's word and work in their lives—and they responded “by faith.” These heroes of faith were people just like us who saw God working in their world and found ways—sometimes dramatic and courageous ways—to join God in His work. The message is clear: These people trusted God and endured confidently in Him. We can do the same.

The first real-life example of faith comes from the life of Abel, whose full story is recorded in Genesis 4:1-10. Even unchurched people may be somewhat familiar with the story of Cain killing his brother, Abel. Why did Cain kill his brother in a jealous rage? God accepted Abel's offering, “but he did not have regard for Cain and his offering” (v. 5).

What was the difference in their two offerings? We are not told much, but the text offers hints. Abel was careful to choose the best of his flock to offer to God (v. 4). Cain seems to have been careless in what he chose to offer to God (v. 3). It was not the offerings themselves that made them acceptable or unacceptable; it was the attitudes behind those offerings.

As noted earlier, faith is confidence and trust in God; it is a response to who God is, what He says, and how He has worked. Abel expressed that confidence and trust—his faith—through his

worship. His faith in God affected the way he made his offering. In his faith, Abel was sure to choose the best he had to bring before God.

QUESTION 3:

What's the relationship between faith and genuine worship?

When my dad was forty years old, he was diagnosed with a fast-growing malignant cancer in his neck. As a teenage boy, I watched my dad walk to the backyard where he stood all alone. He raised his hands in the air to praise God. In that moment, I heard my father pray out loud, “God, I know that this cancer could not have gotten to me unless it first went through You. So in that assurance, I praise You and I trust You.”

Because of my father's faith, he was able to respond in worship even in the darkest moment of his life. When we have faith in God, a natural response is to worship Him.

Cain apparently did not show the same trust in God. He had no faith in God, and as a result, his offering was not a true act of faith and worship. Cain's offering simply did not mean much to him; so, it didn't mean much to God.

Our confidence that God alone is God and no one is like Him affects our choices and actions. Since no one is greater than God, why would we want to bring less than our best to Him? Abel understood this.

“LEARNING TO WALK BY FAITH IS VERY MUCH LIKE
LEARNING TO WALK IN THE DARK.”

Jennifer Rothchild



HEBREWS 11:5-6

⁵ By faith Enoch was taken away, and so he did not experience death. He was not to be found because God took him away. For before he was taken away, he was approved as one who pleased God. ⁶ Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

The writer of Hebrews referred to Enoch for his second example of a person of faith. We know very little about the extraordinary life of Enoch.

The fifth chapter of Genesis is a genealogy that prepares to introduce us to another man of faith named Noah (Hebrews 11:7; see also Genesis 6:1–9:29). As we read through the genealogy, we get the impression that life went on fairly normally—people were born, lived, and died.

But then there was Enoch (Genesis 5:21-24). Enoch was the father of Methuselah—the oldest person recorded in Scripture—and when Enoch was 365 years old, “he was not there” (v. 24). “God took him.” He never died. He simply went from walking with God in this life to walking with God in eternity. That is all we are told. The writer of Hebrews wrote that Enoch’s faith was the key to this new reality.

Like any good teacher, the writer of Hebrews stopped to emphasize his point. He made it rather bluntly as if he were trying to make sure we are paying attention: “without faith it is impossible to please God.”

QUESTION 4:

Why is faith a necessary element for a relationship with God?

Why is that? The church has often stressed the priority of faith over works, and this passage helps us understand why faith takes priority.

Without faith, works would never happen. There is no motivation to do anything if we don’t “believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

And what rewards do we seek? Riches? Fame? No, we do not want anything so shallow or insignificant. We want the victory God gave Enoch—an eternity of walking with God.

QUESTION 5:

Based on this passage, how would you summarize what it means to live a life of faith?

Faith opens up our understanding to see that we find a different reality in the presence of God. We find everything that is truly important in His presence—things like peace, love, joy, and hope. We believe only God possesses these things and make them part of our lives. Faith—confidence in who God is and what His coming kingdom has in store for His people—causes us to live our lives now the way we will live one day in heaven. A life of victory.

KNOW WHOM YOU TRUST

Failure to trust God often stems from a doubt about His nature.

Look at the list of words of some of God's characteristics below.

Reflect on which characteristic you need to trust in God, and then write a brief prayer asking God to strengthen your knowledge of Him in this area.

- Good**
- Loving**
- All-powerful**
- Just**
- Merciful**
- Faithful**
- Holy**
- Generous**
- Attentive**

Write:

