

A Necessary Faith

Do you remember how you felt when you were young and your birthday was coming up? Remember being both excited and anxious? You knew you'd be getting presents and special treats. But some of it would be a surprise. Birthdays combine assurance and anticipation—and so does faith! Faith is the conviction based on past experience that God's fresh surprises will surely be ours in His own time.

Trace your way back to the beginning point of your faith, which was believing in God's character; for the beginning point of faith is believing that God is who He says He is. And that leads you to believing in God's promises; for the end point of faith is believing that He will do what He says He will do.

One of my favorite verses in the whole Bible is Hebrews 11:13—which describes how the faithful saints mentioned throughout the chapter, after encountering the Lord's promises, "were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (KJV). Let's admit it: We are foreigners and nomads on this earth; we're simply passing through; this world is not our home; we cannot live here forever. While it is best for us not to be so attached to this world's possessions, it is best to put our trust in the Lord. Here, we're simply hunting for our true home "longing for a better country—a heavenly one" (Heb. 11:16). What the Lord wants most from our time here is a personal and dynamic relationship with Him that will transform our life now—with the promise of even better things to come.

- 1.** *How would you describe the key components of faith in your own words?*
- 2.** *What does it mean to say we are "strangers and pilgrims" in this world?*
- 3.** *How can you develop a closer relationship with God by walking in faith?*

Faith Perceives the Imperceptible

Hebrews 11:1-4, KJV

1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

2 For by it the elders obtained a good report.

3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

Hebrews 11:1-4, NIV

¹Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ²This is what the ancients were commended for.

³By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

⁴By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.

In the first four verses of chapter 11, we see that faith is necessary for at least three important aspects of our walk with the Lord: 1) to perceive the imperceptible, 2) to trust that God is our Creator, and 3) to approach and worship Him rightly.

Our five senses cannot perceive two fundamental aspects of reality. One is with events that have not yet happened—"things hoped for"—and the other is in regard to God and His spiritual realm—"things not seen" (Heb. 11:1, KJV). People have no way of knowing with certainty what will happen in the next hour, much less the next year or decade. Similarly, Scripture says that God is spirit (John 4:24), and so, we cannot perceive Him with our physical senses. In both cases—future events and the spiritual realm—it is by faith that we perceive the imperceptible. Faith makes our hope in God's promises regarding the future events as sure as if they had just occurred yesterday.

Faith also gives us the assurance of what we cannot see—namely, God and His heavenly domain. It is by faith that we believe in the existence of the God of the Bible, even though we cannot see Him. However, it is not a blind faith, for there is

evidence everywhere in creation that our Creator God exists.

The existence of the physical universe really has only three explanations: 1) Matter is eternal and the way things are now is the result of chance; 2) Matter popped into existence out of nothing and again everything since then is due to chance; or 3) our eternal God created everything we can see out of nothing—*ex nihilo*. Since no one can prove absolutely which of the three is true, belief in each must be taken by a certain kind of faith. But only faith in the God of the Bible as Creator of all things brings true hope for this life and the life to come.

4. *What does faith allow God's people to perceive?*

5. *What does faith allow God's people to know about Him?*

6. *How then should we approach our Creator God in worship?*

Faith Pleases God

Hebrews 11:5-8, KJV

5 By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

7 By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Hebrews 11:5-8, NIV

⁵By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: "He could not be found, because God had taken him away." For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. ⁶And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

⁷By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping

KJV

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

NIV

with faith.

⁸By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

As we look at the next three examples of faith in action—Enoch, Noah, and Abraham—we will see that it takes true faith to please God. True faith not only leads people to believe that He exists, but also helps us “see” that He is an active participant for good in the lives of those who earnestly seek Him.

Genesis 5:21-24 adds to the little we know about Enoch, noting that “Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years” (vs. 22). By faith, Noah built the ark as God commanded. When we walk in faith we please Him and know that He will always be with us. So, in trials, those who walk closely with God can trust Him for deliverance, one way or another.

Abraham is another example of God’s grace. Though he is commended for his faith in responding to God’s call, it took a while for him to respond fully (compare Gen. 12:1-5; Acts 7:1-4). Yet, there is no condemnation given regarding Abraham’s delay, only commendation for ultimately trusting and obeying the Lord.

7. What must people believe to please God?

8. How was the faith of Enoch, Noah, and Abraham demonstrated?

Faith Provides Hope

Hebrews 11:13-16, KJV

13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a

Hebrews 11:13-16, NIV

¹³All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. ¹⁴People who say such

KJV

country.

15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.

16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

NIV

things show that they are looking for a country of their own.

¹⁵If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Not only did these saints of old live by faith, but they also died in their faith. Though they did not receive everything God had promised in their lifetime, their faith that God would one day fulfill all His promises did not waver. They understood that this world was not their home but that they were foreigners and strangers on their way to a better place. They may have lived in this world, but their hearts longed for a future, heavenly country that they could ultimately call home. Because of their future hope and trust that God would keep His promises, they were able to stand in faith and live in a manner that pleased Him.

Therefore, as a result of their faith and heavenly mindedness, they received a commendation of hope; God is not ashamed to be called their God. Furthermore, He has prepared a city for them and us (see Rev. 21:1-26). With this glorious hope in mind, may we be encouraged to live in a manner that pleases the Lord and makes Him not ashamed to be called our God. We can do this, but only if we live by faith, looking forward to an eternity with Him in the heavenly city.

9. *How did these Old Testament saints perceive what they could not see with their eyes?*

10. *What did these saints of old understand about this current life on earth?*

11. *What did they sincerely desire, even long for?*

Live in Faith

How do we live out forward-looking faith in our daily lives? When Enoch first determined to walk faithfully with God, he probably had no idea that he would be taken from life here on earth directly into God's presence. The Bible doesn't say much about what trials he might have endured, except for a brief reference in Jude: "Enoch . . . prophesied about them . . . to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness" (vss. 14-15). Although many believe, considering the context of the letter, that this refers to false teachers preceding Christ's return, these ungodly men may have lived in the days leading up to the Flood; one can only imagine the trials God's faithful people might have endured during that time! When we walk with God through trials, our faith pleases Him when we look forward in hope and expectation to a better place in eternity with Him.

Noah believed, trusted, and obeyed God when God called him to build an ark—which made no sense. God considered Noah a righteous man because of his faith. God may call us to do something we don't understand at the time; we cannot see God's purpose. Later we might realize our obedience opened the door for another person to see God's love and mercy and accept His salvation.

Similarly, Abraham believed what God said about the future and followed in obedience to a land he had never seen before. Even when God asks us to walk with Him and we cannot see what lies ahead, our faith is not blind. We see His existence in His creation, and our trust in His character gives us hope and confidence that He has our ultimate best interests at heart.

12. *When has God fulfilled a promise to you that strengthened your faith?*

13. *How can we live out a forward-looking faith in our daily lives?*

14. *What is one reason we can look forward to God's heavenly city?*

Stepping Out in Faith

Think about what you have learned about faith in this lesson and how you can apply it to your life today. No matter how long we have been a faithful follower of the Lord, He continues to call us to a deeper relationship as we walk in faith, believing with all our being that He will do what He says He will do.

► *Write a personal definition of faith: what do you hope for in confidence? What are you certain of that you cannot see? In which area(s) of your life is it easiest for you to walk in faith? In what way(s) is it most difficult? How might you apply what you have learned in this lesson to the difficult area(s)?*

KEY VERSE

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. —Hebrews 11:1, KJV

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. —Hebrews 11:1, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Week of August 9 through August 15

(See *The Quiet Hour* for devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Mark 8:31-37—Save Your Life by Losing It.

Tues. 1 Peter 3:9-19—Respond to Abusers with Blessings.

Wed. Revelation 2:8-11—Be Faithful Until Death.

Thurs. Hebrews 10:1-10—Sanctified by Christ's Sacrifice.

Fri. Hebrews 10:11-18—The Inner Life of New Believers.

Sat. Hebrews 10:19-22—Approach God with a Pure Heart.

Sun. Hebrews 10:23-36—Act in Ways That Preserve the Faith.