

Faith Defined
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Hebrews 11:1–7 (ESV)

Today's lesson is all about FAITH in God. But let's start with the overall idea of faith.
How would you describe the concept of faith? What words would you use?

Easton's Bible Dictionary defines FAITH this way:

1. Faith is in general the persuasion of the mind that a certain statement is true Its primary idea is trust. A thing is true, and therefore worthy of trust.
 2. Faith is the result of teaching. Knowledge is an essential element in all faith, and is sometimes spoken of as an equivalent to faith
 3. Faith includes in it...an act of the will in addition to the act of the understanding.
- Easton, M. G. (1893). Easton's Bible dictionary. New York: Harper & Brothers.

In other words, I've become convinced in my mind that something is so true I'm willing to take ACTION on it by faith!

Warren Wiersbe describes faith in God this way:

True Bible faith is not blind optimism or a manufactured "hope-so" feeling. Neither is it an intellectual assent to a doctrine. It is certainly not believing in spite of evidence! That would be superstition. True Bible faith is confident obedience to God's Word in spite of circumstances and consequences.

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible exposition commentary (Heb 11:1–3). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The big idea of this lesson is found in verse six: You can't please God without trusting Him; and He rewards those who do.

Hebrews 11:1–7 (ESV)

11 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 For by it the people of old received their commendation. 3 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. 4 By faith Abel offered to God 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. 5 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. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. 7 By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

- Verse one of chapter 11 gives us a two part definition of faith.
- **What is the first part? “Faith is the...?” different translations have different words, what does yours have?**
- Now faith is the...assurance...confidence...substance...of what we hope for.
- **What does it mean to hope for things? How about the opposite, if I don’t hope for anything, what does that say about my outlook on life?**
- The King James Version says “Faith is the SUBSTANCE of things hoped for.” **What does it mean when we say something is SUBSTANTIAL? (Foundation)**
- What if I came in your home testing the floor and every chair and sofa for support?
- But isn’t that what we often do when it comes to faith in God? We’re just not sure.
- So: Faith is the FOUNDATION of my hopes for the future.
- The old hymn says: *“My hope is build on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness!”*
- Still in verse one: **What is the second part of this definition of faith?**
- Faith is...the conviction...assurance...evidence...of things not seen.
- **What does that mean? My faith is so strong that...(what?)**
- **What evidence causes me to have that kind of assurance or confidence in God?**

R.C. Sproul writes:

I don’t know what tomorrow is going to bring, but I know that God knows what tomorrow is going to bring. So if God promises that tomorrow will bring something, and if I trust God for tomorrow, I have faith in something I have not yet seen. That faith serves as evidence because its object is God. I know Him; He has a track record—He is infallible and never lies. God knows everything and is perfect in whatever He communicates. So if God tells me that something is going to happen tomorrow, I believe it even though I haven’t seen it yet. (Emphasis mine)

Sproul, R. C. (2010). Vol. 8: What Is Faith?. The Crucial Questions Series (7). Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing.

How can I trust in what I cannot yet see? My experience with God gives me EVIDENCE that I can believe what I can’t yet see!

2 For by it the people of old received their commendation.

- **What does that mean? What was their “commendation?”**
- **What word does your translation have?** [Commended...gained approval... obtained a good report...earned a good reputation.]

3 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.

- Verse three describes the first, most basic thing to believe about God...**what is it?**
- One perfect illustration of this: Looking into the face of a brand new little life.
- It would take incredible “faith” for me to look at the intricacies of the human form and say this just came together without a master designer!

- So, here's the point: If I believe God can make everything I see out of nothing; **what does that say about trusting Him for what I hope for and need today?**
- These early Christians were discouraged and thought of giving up on Jesus.
- They needed some examples of faith to break them out of discouragement. (Guthrie)
- Let's look at just three from the book of Genesis. (You should read all the rest too!)

4 By faith Abel offered to God 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.

- **Why was Abel's sacrifice more acceptable to God? Wrong kind of sacrifice? Was it because of the TYPE of offering? The QUALITY of the offering? Or, the HEART of the person making the offering (verse four)? Or was it all of the above?** Scholars disagree on this, but one conclusion is for sure...

R.C. Sproul writes:

Some people argue that the reason for the difference in God's response was that Abel offered an animal sacrifice while Cain offered produce of the fields, but nothing in the Bible says that only an animal offering is acceptable to God. All kinds of occasions for grain offerings, cereal offerings, and others are set forth in the Old Testament, so it is not appropriate for us to conclude that God accepted Abel's sacrifice and rejected Cain's because of the nature of the sacrifices themselves. Instead, Abel is commended here in Hebrews 11 not because he gave an animal but because he offered his sacrifice by faith.

Sproul, R. C. (2010). Vol. 8: What Is Faith?. The Crucial Questions Series (21). Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing.

5 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.

- All we know about Enoch was that he "walked with God" (Gen. 5:24.) Nothing spectacular, he just "walked with God." and verse five says he "pleased God."

6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

- You don't have to be a great theologian to understand verse six.
- **What must you have to please God?**
- **What do you have to believe about God?**
- Let's don't take this verse out of context and make it incorrect!
- **So, If I believe there is a God I'm bound for heaven, right?** (James 2:19, 20)
- Believing God exists is just the beginning. What does the last part of verse six say?
- Some translations: "Diligently;" "earnestly;" "sincerely."
- Illustration: Romantic relationship. Not existence but relationship!

- Abel and Enoch were two heroes of faith who didn't do anything dramatic. They just had the right relationship with God. I believe that was on purpose to encourage us.
- Verse seven shows us one who took some big risks in faith...

7 By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

- **If you could only describe Noah with ONE WORD, what word would it be?**
- Noah starts building a HUGE boat in a land where there had never been rain. **What was life like for Noah? How do you think he was treated?**
- Noah, was the first person to act (boldly) in faith based on a message from God. (Guthrie)
- It's not real faith unless we are prepared to ACT on it!
- Before we close, a word about what faith is NOT:

John MacArthur:

"The notion that exists in this Faith Movement, as it's called,...is that faith is a power that you possess to create your own future. Nothing could be further from the truth. That is a lie, it is a deception. Faith is not a power which you possess to create your own future. Faith is a God-given ability to trust the future that God has promised you."

God is not a "genie in a lamp" and faith is not rubbing the lamp and making three wishes. Faith is trusting the Sovereign creator of the universe to do what He said He would do, and that what He will do is in my best interest!

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Our struggle to trust God is inherited. It's been said lack of faith in God is what caused the first sin in the Garden of Eden.
- Some people say it's too hard to exercise faith in living life. Is that true?
- We exercise faith every day. The question is what/who is the OBJECT of our faith?

Based on verse six, The Life Application Commentary says the life of faith may be said to have at least three components:

- (1) Believing that God exists.
- (2) Coming to God and seeking him earnestly (I would add DAILY).
- (3) Confidence that God will reward (us if we) exercise such faith.

Some challenging questions for you and me this week:

- Do I just intellectually believe that God exists, or do I REALLY trust Him?
- Am I seeking Him diligently and daily for what He would have me to do?
- Am I CONFIDENT that based on God's track record He will do what is best for me?

Remember, without FAITH it's impossible to please Him!