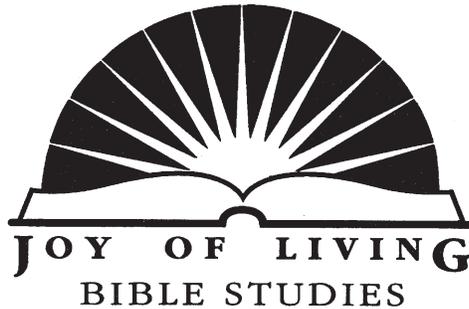


Hall of Faith Lesson 1



Christian Faith

"If only I had more faith!" Is there a Christian anywhere who at some time has not thought or said these words when life dealt a disappointing blow? Faith is absolutely essential to the development of the Christian life. As a matter of fact, faith is the *only* way to live a full life. The Bible says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6).

It was Henry David Thoreau, that rather eccentric philosopher of long ago, who once said, "If I seem to walk out of step with others it is because I am listening to another drumbeat." I am not sure about Thoreau's drumbeat, but that is a good description of a Christian's walk of faith. Believers walk by faith listening to a drumbeat that is different from the world. We listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit living within us who instructs and guides.

In view of the absolute necessity of faith for the believer, welcome to this series of Bible studies in which we will devote ten lessons to the study of faith. What better source for such a study than the great "faith" chapter found in Hebrews 11. It is one of the best known of the great chapters of the Bible and has been called the "Hall of Faith," the "Westminster Abbey of Scripture," and even the "Parade of the Heroes of Faith."

This is not another study of the book of Hebrews. Because the focus is on faith this is primarily a study of chapter 11 plus portions of the Old Testament. Hebrews 11 deals with the power available to the Christian through faith in God.

We do not know for certain whom God chose to write the book of Hebrews but we do know that He guided the writer to lay a firm foundation throughout the book for the message of faith in Christ. Many authorities believe that perhaps the Apostle Paul was the writer.

What Kind of Faith?

As we dig into Hebrews 11 we will quickly discover this faith is far more than the day-to-day variety. Perhaps we are not always aware that our lives are governed daily by natural faith. For example, you go to your place of employment and work because you have faith that your employer will pay you and that there are enough funds in his/her account to cover your paycheck. You step into an aircraft because you have faith in the pilot to maneuver that plane. You take your car to a repair shop and you have faith that the mechanics will repair your car.

The point is the day-to-day variety of *natural* faith depends on man or an object that is not necessarily reliable. Your employer may not be able to pay you due to his cash flow; pilots and mechanics may lack training and experience and your faith in them is useless.

Faith in Hebrews 11 is *spiritual* faith. The object of that faith is the Almighty God who is all-powerful, all-knowing and everywhere present. Nothing is impossible for Him. He is a miracle-working God and absolutely dependable. The eternal nature of God is such that He does not change. He was faithful to people of old and He will remain eternally faithful to us. God Himself has promised, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). We can take His promises at face value because the Bible says God does not lie (see Titus 1:2). Faith in people may disappoint you, but God gave His word and promised, "I the LORD do not change" (Malachi 3:6). The obvious difference between natural and spiritual faith is the *object* of that faith.

Faith can mean different things to different people. For some, faith means a positive inward look—the "have faith in yourself" concept. While that idea may be satisfactory for some it is not the teaching of the Bible. To others, faith means strong feelings of optimism—"I believe everything is going to be all right." Again, this concept, while it may contain a grain of truth, is sorely lacking. Saint Augustine, one of the early church fathers, had a far more comprehensive definition: "Faith is to believe the word of God for what we do not see, and its reward is to see and enjoy what we believe."

What Is Faith?

According to *Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary*, the word faith is defined as "allegiance to duty or a person; loyalty; fidelity to one's promises; belief and trust in and loyalty to God; belief in the traditional doctrine of a religion; firm belief in something for which there is no proof."

Rather than defining faith, Hebrews 11:1 describes what faith *is*: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." The remaining verses of chapter 11 lead the reader through a "Hall of Faith" to show how faith worked in the lives of famous, illustrious individuals from the Old Testament.

Getting Our Bearings

I shall never forget my thrill and excitement the first time I visited the beautiful city of Rome. The rushing traffic, the honking horns and the maze of streets were overwhelming and confusing. Then our tour group went to St. Peter's Square and climbed the narrow, winding stairs to the top of the majestic basilica. From that lofty height we looked out over the city and saw the Tiber River winding through Rome. As we identified prominent buildings and landmarks some of my confusion disappeared as I was able to get the layout of the city and with it my bearings.

As we launch into our study, we too need an "aerial" view—a brief view of the book of Hebrews. We need to do this in view of the fact that we are beginning near the end of the book rather than at chapter 1. It is always risky to take a Bible verse or chapter out of its context; thus we need to look at chapter 11 in its proper setting.

Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were wavering a bit in their faith. They had lost their first enthusiasm and were not growing, thus they were seriously lacking in spiritual understanding (see Hebrews 5:11-14). There was the real danger they would "drift away" (Hebrews 2:1) because of unbelief as Hebrews 3:12 indicates: "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." If they continued and rejected the gospel of Christ, God's judgment lay ahead.

The writer of Hebrews sees one thing very clearly and that is that Jesus Christ is the only complete answer to every human need. Over and over throughout the book the deity and humanity of Christ is stressed as the writer focuses on what has been accomplished by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Through Christ there is a new way open for all.

A New Way Opened

To illustrate the new way the writer of Hebrews uses a spiritual truth familiar to the Jewish Christians, namely the Old Testament Tabernacle. Step-by-step comparison is made between the old way of worship and sacrifices, which was only a dim shadow of things to come, and the wonderful new way now available to all believers through the redemptive work of Christ, our real High Priest (see Hebrews 9 and 10).

To help us better understand the comparison of the blessings of Christ's redemptive work and the old way, let's briefly review the purpose of the Old Testament Tabernacle and the functions of the priests based on Exodus and Leviticus.

Because the Israelites were a nomadic people God instructed them to build a portable Tabernacle for worship and sacrifices. Within the Tabernacle court was a tent constructed according to God's exact specifications. The tent had two parts, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. These two areas were separated by a heavy, beautiful woven curtain. The main purpose of the curtain was to separate—to separate man from the Most Holy Place, the most sacred area of the

Tabernacle. In the Most Holy Place was the Ark of the Covenant, the place where God had promised, "I will meet with you and give you all my commands" (Exodus 25:22). All Israel knew that the Tabernacle and all that pertained to it was a reminder of God's presence with His people.

Unfortunately, an ordinary Israelite could come only to the gate of the Tabernacle court. The Levites came into the court and the priests could go into the court and into the Holy Place.

Only the high priest was permitted to enter the sacred Most Holy Place once a year and then only after he had been ceremonially cleansed by the sprinkling of sacrificial blood. On the Day of Atonement the high priest entered that sacred place to seek God's forgiveness for Israel as he took with him the shed blood of an atoning sacrifice. The same pattern of sacrifice was followed later after the Temple was built in Jerusalem.

The Tabernacle was a picture or pattern of the coming redemptive work of Christ, but it was only a pattern. The common person was barred from the special inner presence of God. Hebrews 9:8, in referring to the high priest's annual offering says, "The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing."

As long as the common man was barred from the Most Holy Place he clearly could not have access to God or enjoy His presence. The sacrifices the high priest made "were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper" (Hebrews 9:9), "because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). Yet the whole idea of sacrifice and worship was to give all people an access to God. The Almighty is a holy and sinless God, thus access into His presence demands purity. Man's sin must somehow be atoned for and man must be cleansed. Until he is cleansed there can be no access to God. That cleansing, says Hebrews, has been done by Christ's death and resurrection.

After laying that groundwork the writer of Hebrews now compares the earthly Tabernacle to heaven where Christ is seated at the right hand of God in the Most Holy Place. Christ "did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12).

The Bible says when the Lord Jesus died on the cross, "The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (Mark 15:38). By means of the cross the Lord Jesus abolished the curtain of separation and He became our High Priest. That's not all the good news. Unlike a human high priest, the Lord knows our needs and concerns. Hebrews 4:14-16 says "Since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God...we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence." No more need for a curtain that separates. No more need for a human priest to plead our case. Thanks be to God, we now have direct, individual access to God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our High Priest

By offering Himself as our High Priest the Lord Jesus Christ has provided great benefits for us (see Hebrews 9:12-15). First, He “obtained eternal redemption” (verse 12). Jesus Christ did a work of deliverance that permanently frees God’s people from the stain and punishment of sin.

Second, by shedding His own blood Jesus Christ is able to “cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” (verse 14). This verse builds on verse 9 where the writer pointed out the weakness of animal sacrifices that “were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper.” The sacrifices under the old system were concerned with food, drink and ceremonial cleansing that people observed until Christ came with a new way. Although these sacrifices were faithfully practiced they did not remove the guilt of sin and really served only as an annual reminder of sins.

Before Christ’s death as long as the Tabernacle and Temple stood, sacrifices were made daily morning and evening (see Numbers 28:3-8). There were meat-offerings, burnt-offerings and drink-offerings. In addition to the daily offerings, the most sacred offering was made on the Day of Atonement. Because this sacred offering occurred once a year, as soon as the ritual was completed the inevitable accumulation of sin began again to be confessed on the next Day of Atonement despite the daily, weekly and monthly sacrifices throughout the year.

The benefits of the new covenant are so important the writer refers to it again in Hebrews 10:1-2: “The law is *only a shadow* of the good things that are coming...It *can never*, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, *make perfect* those who draw near to worship” (italics added).

Third, by His death and resurrection “Christ is the mediator of a new covenant” (Hebrews 9:15). This is true because a death has taken place—the death of Christ on the cross. What the law could not do was accomplished by Christ. He came to earth, became Man and in His perfect, sinless manhood was obedient to the Father. Jesus Christ, by shedding His blood, became the perfect sacrifice by taking our sins upon Himself. When He “had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God” (Hebrews 10:12). The price was paid. His death fully satisfied all redemptive requirements. From the shame of the cross, Christ was exalted to the highest place of glory. His death blots out sins of the past, present and future.

The Life of Faith

Hebrews 10:19-26 summarizes what has been said, and points out the life that can be ours because of what Christ has done. Look at verses 19 through 21. Notice the phrase “we have”—there are two of them. First, because of His redemptive work all believers have free access into God’s presence: “We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place” (verse 19). The way to God is open thus we need not offer a fresh sacrifice to gain entrance. We have joyous confidence to enter His presence by the blood of Jesus at any time and anywhere. Jesus is our representative. By recognizing and confessing our own sinful-

ness and admitting our need for a Savior we may ask Christ Jesus to become our Redeemer. John 1:12 says, “To all who received [Christ], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” The decision to renounce self and to accept Christ as personal Savior must be your first step of faith.

Second, “we have a great priest over the house of God” (Hebrews 10:21). Hebrews 3:6 says “we are his house” and here the writer describes the indwelling Holy Spirit who makes His home within the heart of every believer at the time of conversion. What a tremendous truth concerning the life of faith! Christianity is not some weak attempt on our part to imitate Christ. We have God’s power within our very being. Our High Priest, Jesus Christ, is absolutely able to guide us in all circumstances of life.

Hebrews next challenges all who have experienced the inward cleansing through Christ’s redemption to do three practical things:

First, “Draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith” (10:22). To put it another way, our pattern for living is to continually depend on His indwelling power during every hour of the day. We need not depend on our own abilities, talents, education, cleverness or any other human trait. By drawing near “in full assurance of faith” we give opportunity for God to work in our lives. By faith and in quiet confidence we believe He who lives within us is able to work in all circumstances.

The danger for many is that we become so busy we forget to spend time with God. When we do, there is a tendency to take things into our own hands. Before we know it, our faith begins to weaken and we depend more on our own strength. That cycle spells trouble.

Second, “Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful” (10:23). Phillips in *The New Testament in Modern English* says it this way: “In this confidence let us hold on to the hope that we profess without the slightest hesitation—for he is utterly dependable.”

The story is told of a young orphan girl who believed God is utterly dependable and who demonstrated her faith without hesitation. She lived in India where evil ran rampant and the life of a girl was cheap. Missionaries came to her village and for the first time she learned that God loved *her* as a person.

The day came when her missionary friends had to return to their main station. Fearful of losing the only friends she had ever had, she begged to go with them. Shortage of funds and other obstacles, however, made her request impossible. Crying and waving to her departing friends the girl called out, “Please pray that God will let you take me home with you and I will pray too.”

At their compound the missionaries found a letter containing a large check. Immediately they thought of their young friend. Early the next day a scout was sent out from the compound to bring the girl to her new home. It was a long trek, therefore the scout and girl were not expected to return until late that night. At noon the happy girl and scout were back. With complete confidence she said, “When I prayed, God seemed to tell me this was to be my home, so I thought I might as well

get started." She had almost reached the mission when the scout met her. That is real faith in God!

Not only are we to draw near to God, but we are to speak out and tell what the Lord has done, and is doing in our lives. God is faithful, so you may be sure that when your listeners hear about your confidence and joy in the Lord they will soon realize you have something they are missing. Perhaps they will begin to ask questions. Then you may assure them that what He has done for you He will do for them as well.

Furthermore, we need to hold on to the hope we have, to get a firm grip on our faith in God, because Satan is always ready to mock, to deceive and to cast doubt. By drawing near to God, by living in dependence on Him, we will discover that we are developing a faith in Him that nothing can shake.

Third, "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together...but let us encourage one another" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

The words of these two verses bring to mind the old saying: "What you do speaks so loudly I can't hear what you are saying." The best encouragement and Christian witness is to let others see what the Lord is doing in your life. Christians need other believers around, thus Hebrews says we are to meet together to encourage one another. Who has not seen their own problems diminish a bit—or has not been encouraged—when hearing about the mighty things the Lord is doing among fellow believers?

Live by Faith

Having presented a strong foundation for the need of faith, the last portion of Hebrews 10 is an encouragement to go forward. The writer of Hebrews realizes that most of the people to whom he is writing have already proven their true faith in Christ. Despite hardships and persecution the early Christians experienced love, joy and hope. They had followed Christ regardless of the cost. Their own attitude during difficulties demonstrated they were fully aware these were experiences which, as Christians, they were expected to bear.

Notice the strong encouragement in verse 35: "So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded." Instead of turning back to an easier way, the believers were to patiently keep both their faith and their hope high because the reward is certain.

Living by faith does not mean being exempt from trouble. We were never promised a rose garden. Sometimes we forget that Jesus Christ promised, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). We take heart and go forward when we take God at His word and remember that the Lord Jesus is who He says He is and that the prediction for the world is going to turn out as He promised. Christians must realize that in the will of God there is often a time of waiting, working and trials before God's promised fulfillment can be enjoyed.

Hebrews chapter 10 concludes with a quote from the Old Testament where the prophet Habakkuk tells his people that if they hang on

to their faith in God, He will see them through their present problems, but the condition is based on holding on and not shrinking back. Obviously the key is faith. All who live by faith and die in faith will rejoice in the final salvation guaranteed in Christ. The writer of the epistle encourages the early Christians they are doing the right thing. All they needed to do was to keep on and not shrink back to their old ways.

We, too, need to count on God's faithfulness to fulfill all that He has promised because "The righteous will live by faith" (Romans 1:17, see also Hebrews 10:38). Not by circumstances, not by logic, but by faith in the Almighty God and in His Word.

Points to Ponder

In her book *What the Bible Is All About*, the late Dr. Henrietta C. Mears, founder of Gospel Light Publications said, "The secret of Christian living is simply allowing Christ to meet your needs...Faith is just trusting God, believing Him. There is nothing mysterious about faith. It is simply an act of will. Either we will believe God or we won't. We decide." What is your response to this statement?

Study Questions

Before you begin each day:

- ☞ Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- ☞ Use only the Bible for your answers.
- ☞ Write your answers and the verses you used.
- ☞ Challenge questions are for those who have the time and wish to do them.
- ☞ Personal questions are to be shared with the class only if you wish to share.
- ☞ If you desire, insert your name in the assigned verses to make them more personal.

First Day: Read the commentary on Christian faith.

1. What helpful or new thought did you find in the commentary concerning Christian faith, or from your teacher's lecture? What personal application did you choose to apply to your life?

2. The suggested memory verse is Romans 10:17, or choose another verse that was meaningful to you. Write it down, carry it with you, tack it to your bulletin board, on the dashboard of your car, etc. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its "address" (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

Second Day: Read Hebrews 11:1-6, concentrating on verses 1-2.

1. How does Hebrews 11:1 describe faith?

2. Challenge: In your own words try to write a definition of the word *faith*. You may want to use a dictionary to help you. Remember the definition you write today and see if you need to change it at the end of the course.

3. Read Romans 10:17. Where does faith come from?

4. What assurance do the following Scriptures give you that the Bible can be trusted completely?
2 Timothy 3:16

2 Peter 1:21

5. Throughout the Bible we find references that tell us how essential faith is. Read the following Scriptures and write down two or three words to complete the phrase: By (through) faith we ...
Romans 5:1

2 Corinthians 5:7

Hebrews 10:22

6. a. What does the writer of Hebrews say about past believers in Hebrews 11:2?

- b. Personal: As we continue this study in Hebrews 11, we will meet many believers from the Old Testament who are remembered and commended for their faith. Think of modern obituaries: people are remembered for many different things—for their jobs, their inventions, their celebrity, their wealth. How would you like to be remembered? Why not pray about this now?

Third Day: Review Hebrews 11:1-6, concentrating on verse 3.

1. a. What does Hebrews 11:3 say about the universe?
- b. Challenge: Read Genesis 1:1-27. How does this account of creation confirm what Hebrews 11:3 tells us?
2. If God created the universe, then we know that the world is not eternal—it had a beginning. But God Himself is eternal; He has always existed as the Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. What do you learn about this in the following verses?

Genesis 1:2

John 17:5 (Jesus, God's Son, is speaking to His Father in prayer)

Colossians 1:15-16 (the writer is speaking of Jesus, see verse 13)

3. a. After He created the universe and set it in motion, God did not step back and watch from afar in a disinterested manner, waiting for us to fail. He loves us and calls us to know Him and love Him in return. What does He say in Isaiah 65:1-2?
- b. Personal: God is holding out His hands to you, too. Will you respond to Him, take His hand, and let Him lead you in His ways? Why not pray about this now?
4. How is the creation of man described in Genesis 1:26-27? How are we different from animals?
5. Read Psalm 139:13-16. What does it say about the way you were created?
6. Personal: What does it mean to you that God created you in His image? How does it change your view of God knowing that the Creator of the entire universe also knows you so personally?

Fourth Day: Review Hebrews 11:1-6, concentrating on verse 4.

1. What was Abel's spiritual condition according to verse 4?

2. Read Genesis 4:1-12. Describe Cain and Abel's occupations and what each one brought for his sacrifice. (vPPerses 2b-4)
3. Abel was commended by God as a righteous man. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. How has God provided a way so that we might become righteous?
4. a. Read Genesis 4:5. When Cain's offering was rejected how did he respond?

b. What do you think might have happened if he had admitted he was wrong? Read Micah 7:18 to help you decide.
5. a. Satan loves to make Christians miserable by telling them they have committed a sin God will not forgive. How do the following verses combat that accusation?

Isaiah 55:7

1 John 1:7

b. The next time Satan torments you in this way how can the following verses encourage you to know he is lying?

Romans 8:1

1 John 1:9
6. Personal: Have you asked God to forgive your sins and free you? Why not stop and ask Him right now?

Fifth Day: Review Hebrews 11:1-6, concentrating on verse 5.

1. Enoch is one of the lesser known Old Testament personalities. According to Hebrews 11:5 how was the end of his life unique?
2. a. What impressive truth does Hebrews 11:5b assert about Enoch's relationship with God?

b. What else do you learn about Enoch's relationship to God in Genesis 5:22-24?
3. a. What do these verses say is the relationship between righteousness and faith?

Romans 4:3

Hebrews 10:38

b. Challenge: Based on that truth, how does the description of Enoch's life in Genesis 5:22-24 show he was a man of faith?
4. What benefits do the following Scripture verses promise for those who walk with God?

Psalm 89:15-17

John 8:12

1 John 1:7

5. Read Ephesians 5:8-11. How will your life change if you live or walk with the Lord?
6. Personal: Do you want to walk with the Lord daily? Pray now, and ask Him to help you do this. You can nurture your walk with the Lord by continuing to spend time with Him daily, in prayer and in His Word.

Sixth Day: Reveiw Hebrews 11:1-6, concentrating on verse 6.

1. What does Hebrews 11:6 say is absolutely essential in order to please God?
2.
 - a. The writer of Hebrews says if we come to God we “must believe that he exists.” He seems to be stating an obvious fact and it’s easy to gloss over. But it is possible to say that God exists without truly acting like He exists. Read Galatians 5:6. How does this passage contrast outwardly saying God exists—i.e. the rite of circumcision for a Jewish person—with what happens when we truly believe He exists?
 - b. Personal: Do you believe God exists? Is this something that you primarily express through words—i.e. identifying yourself as a Christian, being a member of a church, etc.—or does your belief that God exists affect your actions? How?
3.
 - a. Hebrews 11:6 also says that God “rewards those who earnestly seek him.” What is the most important reward He gives to those who seek him, according to the following verses?

1 Chronicles 28:9

Jeremiah 29:13
 - b. Personal: Are you earnestly seeking God? What a joy to know that He promises to reveal Himself to us when we seek Him. Write down some of the ways He has revealed Himself to you, or write a prayer telling Him of your search for Him.
4. Read 1 John 5:14-15. In addition to rewarding us with Himself when we seek Him, what else does God promise to those who approach Him?
5. Personal: Look back to Hebrews 11:6 again: “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” Do you feel like your faith is weak? Then ask God to strengthen your faith! He is so gracious, because He promises to give us whatever we ask according to His will, as we saw in 1 John 5 above. And there can be no question that it is in His will for you to have faith in Him. Why not stop now and pray about this?
6. Please share your memory verse with your discussion group or with a friend to encourage them.