

STUDY GUIDE

NEW VISION
MYTHEOLOGY
FAITH CAN FIX ANYTHING
HEBREWS 11:1-7
10/23/2016



MAIN POINT

Faith in faith is an attempt to fix our circumstances. Faith in Christ trusts the sovereign God with our circumstances.

INTRODUCE

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Are you prone to taking risks? Why or why not?

What is the biggest risk you have ever taken? What influenced you to do it? What was the outcome?

Does your opinion about risk say anything about the way you view faith? Why or why not?

Some people confuse taking risks with having faith. Risks generally have no basis for success but faith is characterized by assurance that comes from trusting God. Faith is a biblical concept in which we trust in God with all of our lives, including our future. Faith, more than anything else, is what God is looking for to characterize the lives of His people.

READ AND REFLECT

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ HEBREWS 11:1-3.

Complete the following sentence: "Faith is ."

What do your answers reveal about the nature of faith?

How would you describe faith to someone who has never experienced it? How did the writer of Hebrews describe faith?

Since we have confidence that God has the power to create something good out of nothing, what concerns in your life do you need to turn over to Him, and in the process exercise the faith that pleases Him?

Hebrews 11 provides one of the most beautiful and familiar passages about faith. Invite volunteers to quote Hebrews 11:1 from memory before the class locates it for Bible study or invite the group to say the verse with you as you read it aloud. Enlist volunteers to read the verse from various Bible translations.

The writer of Hebrews described faith in terms of trusting God with assurance that the blessings He promised are real and that the events He has announced are certain.

What is the foundation for Christian faith? What other foundations do people try to use for faith?

What happens when they do not work out?

A relationship with God begins with faith in Jesus. Jesus is the only means for salvation. People place their trust in their own abilities and other people. They are disillusioned when the inevitable happens or when they are let down.

How do your past experiences or the experiences of others affect your faith?

We can draw strength by remembering past experiences when we demonstrated trust in God and His promises. Not only that, but when we see how God worked in others' lives, we are encouraged that He can work in ours.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ HEBREWS 11:4-7.

How did Abel, Enoch, and Noah demonstrate faith?

Who are some New Testament-age "heroes of faith" (including from modern times) that you would include on a "Hall of Faith" list?

While each man's expression of faith was different, each was pleasing to God. God affirmed their acts with His approval.

What do your offerings reveal about your faith in God?

Who are the Abels, Enochs, and Noahs in your life? Who has been a model of faith for you?

How are you demonstrating faith to others? Is it a positive or negative demonstration?

According to verse 6, what does it take to have real faith? Based on this, how real is your faith?

Real faith is trusting God with our lives, including our future. Some people may be willing to have faith—as long as it doesn't go outside the boundaries of their comfort zone. This is not genuine faith. Genuine faith is demonstrated in our obedience to what God says to do. It's this kind of faith God is looking for in His people.

APPLY

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How are faith in God and obedience to His ways related? Can you have one without the other? Explain.

What is one area of your life that God is calling you to exercise faith inside of?

What's one action that is tied to faith in that area of your life?

PRAY

Pray to close your group and ask to be the kind of people who are characterized by faith more than anything else. Pray for the specific situations your group mentioned in which they need to exercise their faith.

COMMENTARY

HEBREWS 11:1-7

11:1-2. In verse 1, we find a good, biblical definition of faith. Faith has always marked God's people and their relationship to God. Indeed, faith marks the difference between a person's receiving God's approval (salvation) or His wrath against sin (destruction).

Faith on the one hand is the reality of what is hoped for. Faith is a firm conviction concerning the promises of God, an unyielding confidence that He will do what He says He will do. On the other hand, faith is the proof of what is not seen. Faith endures even when a particular promise of God does not come to pass on our timetable. We live by faith as Christians because our faith rests in Him, not in ourselves or in our abilities.

For example, God promised Abram (Abraham) that he would have countless descendants at a time when the man and his wife seemed destined to remain childless. Abraham took God at His word, however, and Abraham's faith received God's approval. His faith was credited as righteousness (see Gen. 15:1-6). Abraham was just one of many Old Testament ancestors who received God's approval through trusting in God rather than trusting in themselves or in other created things (see Rom. 1:18-25).

11:3. Verse 3 drives us back to the beginning of creation. Although none of us were alive and present with God when He created the universe, we believe He is the Creator. We can't fully explain the "how" of God's creative work, but we believe, as Genesis 1-2 teaches, that God spoke the words and what He spoke came into existence.

Hebrews 11 makes it clear that God created all that we can see as well as all that we now know is too microscopic or is too far away from us to see physically. He didn't assemble parts and pieces that were already in existence. He brought what is visible into existence out of nothing. If God can do this, then is anything too difficult for Him? Surely not!

It is a tragic irony that in a time when God has allowed humans to invent electron microscopes and space telescopes, so many people choose to deny the fact that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Yet when we look at the complexity and wonder of the universe, we see that there is design and purpose. Such things, by definition, cannot just appear randomly as a result of a cosmic explosion. Design, intention, and purpose are marks of personhood. A Person made what we see, and He did so simply by declaring it to be. Remember, too, that the writer of Hebrews affirmed at the start of his epistle that God's Son upholds all things in the universe by His powerful word (see Heb 1:2). God is in control, because He created and sustains it all! Eyes of faith look at the creation and praise our Creator.

Biblical faith is not blind faith. It stands on the very nature and person of God, and what He has done. It never stands on what we have done! Furthermore, we do not "have faith in faith." Faith has a specific content and object. We believe the revealed truths of God that are real and not abstract. It is not biblical faith merely to have faith in something, so long as you have faith. Rather, we believe very specific things that God has spoken through His prophets and His Son (see Heb 1:1-2). God's Word can and should be believed and relied on. This is biblical faith, and this is what pleases God.

11:4. The writer began his list of faith's heroes with Abel, whose story intertwines with that of his brother, Cain, and is found in Genesis 4. In obedience to God, the first human family, Adam and Eve, bore children. Their first two children were Cain and Abel. After the boys grew up and began working to support themselves, they each decided to present an offering to the Lord God. Cain, a farmer, made an offering to God out of that which he had grown. Abel, however, was a shepherd; he brought some of his firstborn animals as an offering to God. The record in Genesis 4 then reveals simply that the Lord approved of Abel and his offering but had no regard for Cain and his offering (see Gen. 4:4-5).

The inspired writer of Hebrews helps us to understand why the Lord responded as He did to the two men and their offerings. The Lord knew the condition of Abel's heart was that of humble faith and obedience. Therefore Abel was approved as a righteous man. The Lord also knew what was in Cain's heart—or, more precisely, what was missing from Cain's heart. Cain revealed the absence of genuine faith in his heart by his subsequent actions. He was filled with a jealous rage that led him to slaughter his brother. Cain committed this murderous act despite the Lord's merciful warning to Cain about his anger (see Gen. 4:6-7).

Cain's act of ruthless violence displayed the stark difference between a heart of faith towards God (Abel) and a heart without faith and guided by sin. A sacrificial offering was Abel's outward expression of faith, while anger and murder were the expressions of Cain's unbelief. Actions reveal the true condition of the heart. Abel was a righteous man, and the righteous live by faith (see Heb 10:38). His testimony of faithfulness and obedience still serve as an example to us today.

11:5. Next, we come to the example of Enoch in verse 5. Enoch is briefly mentioned in Genesis 5:19-24 as one of the descendants of Seth (Adam's son who was born after Abel's death). Enoch was the son of a man called Jared and the father of Methuselah [mih THOOZ uh luh], whose fame was that of living to be 969 years old (the oldest person in the Bible)! Enoch's fame, on the other hand, was recalled more in spiritual terms. He "walked with God," meaning that he trusted in God and lived in continual obedience to Him. Enoch didn't have to experience physical death; God simply took him.

Again, the writer of Hebrews helps us understand that it was by Enoch's faith that he found favor with God. Like Abel, Enoch demonstrated his faith in God through a life of righteousness. Likewise, both men's responses of faith serve as examples for us today. A heart that has been converted by the power and grace of God revealed in Christ is the same regardless of when the person lives. Faith is and always has been the response that God approves.

The difference between those of us who live after the time of Jesus, and those who lived as far back as Abel and Enoch is that we have been privileged with more of God's revelation. Indeed, we have access to God's ultimate revelation in the Son. We have the gospel message and the New Testament along with the Old Testament as the full Scriptures.

11:6. Having presented a definition of faith and two examples of it, the writer of Hebrews then drew an important conclusion about true, saving faith. Simply put, faith pleases God; therefore, not having faith makes pleasing God impossible! Logically, if people are to draw near to God, they must believe that He actually exists. Biblical faith believes certain and specific truths about God, truths He revealed and preserved in the Scriptures. God is not just a vague notion of "the man upstairs." He is the Everlasting Creator and Redeemer who has revealed Himself to us in His perfect Word.

Believers trust God's Word, even though to an unbeliever the gospel message might sound foolish (see 1 Cor. 1:18). Yet for those of us who know Jesus by faith, there is nothing more reasonable than our obedient trust. Hebrews 11:6 also teaches us that God exists and is not far from us. There are rich blessings that await His children. God's greatest blessing upon those who seek Him is more of Himself!

11:7. The final example in verses 1-7 is that of Noah, whose lengthy but amazing story is found in Genesis 6-9. Mankind had become horribly wicked in all their thoughts and deeds (see Gen. 6:5), so God decided to destroy all of humanity. At the same time, however, Noah found favor with God (see Gen. 6:8). Thus, rather than destroying the righteous along with the unrighteous, God chose to save Noah and his family out of the waters of destruction. He instructed Noah to build an ark in which he, his family, and many pairs of animals would be saved.

It took a man of great faith to obey God's incredible command. Many people probably mocked Noah as he worked, although he also took time to preach righteousness to them (see 2 Pet. 2:5). When the floodwaters came and covered the earth, all mankind perished except Noah and his family (see Gen 7:21-23). Noah lived by faith, and God found favor with him, spared his life, and made a covenant with him (see Gen. 9:8-17). Noah became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith (Heb. 11:7).

What made Noah such a man of faith? He trusted in God. Noah believed God would do what He said that He would do. Noah was convinced of the certainty of the flood before it occurred. This, according to Hebrews 11:1, is the definition of genuine faith. It is the kind of faith believers have in God concerning His promises of forgiveness and everlasting life in Jesus Christ. It is the faith in which we as believers are to endure to the end.