

BIBLE STUDIES**SERIES: HEBREWS CHAPTER 11*****HEROES OF FAITH*****LESSON #1 INTRODUCTION TO HEBREWS ELEVEN**

Hebrews chapter eleven is recognized as the “Faith Chapter” of the Bible, just as I Cor.13 is called the “Love Chapter” and I Cor.15 the “Resurrection Chapter”, etc.

Hebrews 11 illustrates faith in the lives of at least 15 named individuals plus many unnamed. Our object will be to show how the principle of faith operated in the lives of a great variety of people. Faith is that indispensable quality for which God looks.

In this introductory study we will concentrate on the word “*faith*” before we study the lives of persons who exemplified faith. Let us begin with

I. THE DEFINITION OF FAITH.

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb.11:1)

All persons have common faith. That is, faith that we exercise every day – faith in the elevator, in the bank, in the pharmacist, in the doctor, etc. However, biblical faith, although similar, yet is on a much higher level. Let us begin by making sure we understand what biblical faith *is* as well as what it *is not*.

A. What faith is not.

- Faith is not Hope. In 1 Corinthians 13:13, faith and hope are listed together: *“And now abide faith, hope, love....”* Faith is different from hope.
- Faith is not wishing or imagination.
- Faith is not something produced by human emotions. We cannot work ourselves up into a frenzy of excitement and thereby produce faith.
- Faith is not a feeling. To say, “I feel this is right, therefore, I will believe it” is not faith.
- Faith is not a “leap in the dark”. Faith is based upon facts, God’s truth-facts

B. What Hebrews 11:1 says about “faith.”

Heb.11:1 technically not a definition of faith but a description of faith. Therefore, before we move on into this chapter and examine the lives of those who demonstrate faith for us, let us make sure that we understand what this verse says about faith. There are 3 words in Hebrews 11:1 that we need to analyze if we are to understand what faith is. The 3 words are: “*faith*”, “*substance*” and “*evidence*”.

“Faith” - The Greek for faith (*pistis*) means: “*persuasion, belief, trust, acceptance.*”

“Substance” - The word translated “*substance*” (*hupostasis*) in the Greek, means literally

“to stand under or to support.” Faith is the foundation that gives the believer the support and confidence to believe. The verse could be translated *“faith is the confidence of things hoped for.”*

“Evidence” - The word translated *“evidence”* means *“conviction”* and could read, *“and the conviction of things not yet seen.”* This inward conviction enables the believer to believe things not yet seen because God will perform what He has promised. This is why Christians are called “believers”.

Philip Yancey writes in his book, *Finding God In Unexpected Places*: “I have learned that faith means trusting in advance what will only make sense in reverse.”

J. Oswald Sanders sums it up as follows: “Faith enables the believing soul to treat the future as present and the invisible as seen.”

C. So, what is Faith?

- Faith is believing; “believe” and “faith” come from the same root word;
- Faith is based upon God-facts – the facts God has stated in His Word. Unless our faith is established on God-facts, it is no more than conjecture, superstition, speculation or presumption;
- Faith is reliance upon the God known to be trustworthy;
- Faith is having the holy audacity to walk upon the water of God’s Word – taking God at His Word and acting upon it. It is not a “leap in the dark” but a walk upon God’s promises;
- It is believing God, Whom we do not see, for what we do not see which He has promised;
- It is “seeing”, with our spiritual eyesight, what we believe, based solely upon what God has said;
- Faith is a bird that feels dawn breaking and sings while it is still dark;
- Faith is an optic of the soul that enables us to see beyond what the eyes can see;
- Faith is enjoying in the present what is a future reality.

Other translations read:

NASB - *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”*

TLB – *“It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead.”*

Eugene Peterson’s *The Message* transliteration of puts it like this: *“This trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It’s our handle on what we can’t see. The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd. By faith, we see the world called into existence by God’s word, what we see created by what we don’t see.”* (Heb.11:1-2)

ILLUST. This is illustrated in the life of the missionary Hudson Taylor. “When Hudson Taylor, the famous missionary, first went to China, it was in a sailing vessel. Very close to the shore of cannibal islands the ship was caught in a windless calm, and was slowly drifting toward the shore and the savages were eagerly anticipating a feast.

The captain came to Mr. Taylor and asked him to pray for the help of God. 'I will,' said Taylor, 'provided you set your sails to catch the breeze.' The Captain declined to make himself a laughing stock by unfurling the sails in a dead calm. Taylor said, 'I will not undertake to pray for the vessel unless you will prepare the sails to catch the wind when God sends it.' The captain set the sails.

While Taylor was engaged in prayer, there was a knock at the door of his stateroom 'Who is there?' Taylor asked. The captain's voice responded, 'Are you still praying for wind?' 'Yes,' replied Hudson Taylor. 'Well,' said the captain 'you better stop praying for we have more wind than we can manage.'" [Paul Lee Tan. Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations.]

With this understanding of what faith is, a legitimate question now needs to be answered and that is, "How do we get faith?" Therefore, let us talk about the Dawning of Faith.

II. THE DAWNING OF FAITH.

Like the dawning of a new day when the sun arises and chases the darkness of night away, is the dawning of faith in the soul, which brings light and new life.

Does everyone have Bible faith? Not everyone has faith that the Bible talks about. In Deut. 32:20 is this statement: "*children in whom is no faith*"; and in Mark 4:40 Jesus asked, "*How is it that you have no faith?*"

What or Who determines whether we have authentic biblical faith or not? The object of one's faith determines whether it is authentic Bible faith or not. In Mark 11:22 Jesus said, "*Have faith in God*." Faith in an idol, a false religion, one's own goodness etc., regardless of how sincere, is not Bible faith.

Is God the focus of our faith? Having the right quality of faith is essential to our salvation and spiritual progress. So the questions naturally arise, How do we come to have faith in God? "How does one acquire true faith?" First,

A. Jesus is the Source of Our Faith.

Hebrews 12:2 says: "*Let us fix our eyes upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...*" In what sense is He our faith source? The word "*author*" – (Gk. "archeegon") means "*the beginner, source, or cause of anything*". It does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament. The phrase "the beginner of faith," or the leader of faith, would express the idea.

The word "*finisher*" – (Gk. "teleiooteen") means that He is the Completer as well as the Beginner; the last as well as the first. As Rev 1:8,11 states, "*I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last.*" Christ Jesus is the source of all for the believer. But what is the course that faith follows in becoming available to us?

B. The Word is the Course for our Faith.

Faith is based upon God's word. Paul calls God's Word "*the word of faith which we preach*" in Romans 10:8. And he proceeds to show how faith is produced:

“For whoever will call on the name of the lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in him whom they have not heard? and how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent?” And, continuing in v.17 “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” (Romans 10:13-15 &17)

When it is said that “*faith comes from hearing*,” it is not meant that all who hear actually believe, for that is not true; but the meaning is that faith does not exist unless there is a valid message heard. Faith is generated by the Word of God.

The “*word about Christ*” is the message of the Gospel, which heard and believed saves. The context of Romans 10 is about preaching to sinners and their salvation. When that “*word about Christ*” is heard it generates faith, which the hearer in turn reposes in the object of faith, the Lord Jesus Christ, God’s message to mankind. (John 1:1)

Bible Faith then, does not originate with us, but with God. Paul says that it is “*the word of faith*” which he is preaching (Rom.10:8) and that Word is the source *from which* and the course *along which* faith comes. Bible faith, then, dawns in the soul when the “*word of faith*” is believably heard and received.

Once a sinner comes to faith in Christ, that faith must be nourished. Our son, Michael, was the pastor of a church in Washington State in which Sunday School was called “Faith Care.” We are responsible to care for, to nurture our faith.

That leads us to consider how we can develop our faith.

III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAITH.

There are two different usages of the word “*faith*” in the New Testament:

- In Jude we read, “*Earnestly contend for **the faith***.” (Jude v.3) Here, “*the Faith*” means the entire body of revealed truth as it is in Holy Scripture. That term, “*the faith*” appears forty-two times in the New Testament. One time is II Cor. 13:5 - “*Examine yourselves as to whether you are in **the faith***.”
- Then, there is personal saving faith as in Hebrews 11:1. There is quite a difference between having faith within ourselves and being in the faith. We are focusing upon personal faith in this study. That is, we place our personal faith in “*the Faith*” - the written revelation of God as revealed in the totality of Holy Scripture.

When we have come to personal faith in Christ, we are responsible to develop our faith, to cultivate and grow it:

- II Peter 1:5 - “*add to your faith*”;
- Jude 20 - “*But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith.*”
- II Thess.1:3 - Paul said of the Thessalonians, “*Your faith grows....*”

To *add to*, *build up* and *grow* our faith we must understand the nature of faith and nurture our faith.

A. Understand The Nature Of Faith.

Faith begins as a seed: In Matt. 17:20 and in Luke 17:6 Jesus talks about “*mustard seed*” faith. There are degrees of faith:

- Rom. 14:1 speaks of those who are “*weak in faith*”;
- Matt. 8:26 speaks of “*Little faith*”- (5 times Jesus said, “*O, you of little faith*”);
- Rom. 4:20 says that Abraham was “*strong in faith*”;
- James 2:5 speaks of those who are “*rich in faith.*”

Have you ever longed to have more faith? Have you ever wanted to live by faith, like those we read about in Hebrews 11? Romans 1:17 tells us that “*the righteous shall live by faith.*”

The nature of faith is that it is deposited in the womb of our souls as “*baby faith*” and it must grow. In order to live by faith, our faith must grow from a weak faith to a strong and rich faith. The “*muscle*” of faith needs to be exercised in order to grow.

B. Undertake The Nurturing Of Faith.

How can my faith grow? Faith 101 teaches us the following basics about faith growth:

1. Desire to feed your faith on God’s Word.

I Peter 2:2 “*as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby....*” Grow in what way? In every way that our heavenly Father expects His children to grow including growth in faith. Paul told Timothy to be “*constantly nourished on the words of the faith*” (I Tim. 4:6).

ILLUST. The life of Evangelist D.L. Moody, of bygone years, has been an encouragement to many. One time he said, “I prayed for faith and thought that some day it would come down and strike me like lightning. But faith didn’t seem to come. One day I read in Romans that “*faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.*” I had up to this time, closed my Bible and prayed for faith. Now I opened my Bible and began to study and faith has been growing ever since.”

God’s Word is both food and fuel for our faith! So, then, as we get into the Word our faith will be strengthened and stimulated.

2. Exercise the faith you have.

James 2:14-20 “*What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” You believe that God is one You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?*”

- a. The key words are “say” & “show”. James says, “If you say you have faith” then “show that you have faith”; If you profess it then prove it! True faith is based on what God says and is demonstrated in what we do. A faith that does not function is not true faith!
- b. Romans 1:17 also tells us that “*the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.*” Notice the words, “*from faith to faith*”. That is, our progress in faith is from one degree of faith to another.
- c. This phrase “*from faith to faith*” in Rom 1:17, has caused some disagreement among commentators. Some suggest that the phrase does not mean from one stage of faith to another. However, scripture clearly says that there are degrees of faith, as we have already seen (no faith, weak, little, strong and rich faith); furthermore, teachers such as Erasmus, Luther, Melancthon, Calvin, Beza, Grotius, Meyer, etc. agree that the phrase does indeed mean “From one degree of faith to another - from a weaker to a stronger - from a lower to a higher” faith.

Personal faith is progressive. Our progress in faith is from one degree of faith to another, one level of faith to another. Else, how does one’s faith increase? How does one’s faith grow from little, to weak, to strong to rich faith?

- d. Faith, like muscle, grows strong with exercise! So utilizing what faith we have results in more faith. Jesus likened faith to a seed – “*mustard seed*” (Luke 17:6). What do we do with seed? We plant it. Plant the faith you have and it will grow more faith!

3. Practice believing prayer.

I John 5:14-15 encourages believing prayer:

“This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.”

Much prayer is unbelieving prayer. We pray as a formality; we pray as a duty; we pray out of habit, etc. But believing prayer is a different matter altogether. “Believing prayer” is the type of prayer described in James chapter five:

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.” (James 5:16-18)

Prayer that brings a drought and 3 ½ years later ends that draught is no ordinary praying. If ever there was an example of praying with a mature faith, this is it.

4. Fellowship with people of faith.

Fellowshipping with people of faith strengthens faith. That is just one of many reasons that we should be associating regularly with a local group of believers.

The apostle Paul, writing to the Christians in Rome said, Rom. 1:12: *“I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other’s faith, both yours and mine.”* (Rom.1:12)

In writing to the believers in Thessalonica he said: *“...and we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith.”* (1 Thess.3:2)

My faith has been enlarged to a great extent by the example of others, observing how they handled adversity and the challenges that life brings. It rubs off, this thing we call faith. The more we associate with those who really trust God, the more we will become a person of faith.

Just as unbelief is contagious and spreads, so sharing our faith testimonies are an encouragement to other’s faith. Not only do we need each other but we need the “faith lift” that being with others of faith can give.

ILLUST. I was speaking in a Bible Conference in Bermuda when a Doctor who specialized in Plastic Surgery said to me, “You have given me a “faith lift”; if you ever need a “face lift” just let me know!” While I admit that I could probably use a “face lift”, a “faith lift” would be infinitely more worthwhile.

Can you think of someone whose faith has inspired you? People we associate with are like elevator buttons—they can take you up or down!

Another way we can develop our faith is to

5. Study the examples of faith in Hebrews 11.

Hebrews chapter eleven has been called “The Hall Of Faith”; “The Diary Of Faith.” We will become acquainted with men and women of faith like Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Joshua, Rahab, Gideon, etc. These were not great people who had a little faith, but they were ordinary people who had a great faith.

We are now going to begin methodically studying our way through this, the greatest treatise on faith in the Bible. We are going to get a glimpse of the power and possibilities of faith as it is seen operative in the lives of ordinary people. If God would add names to the list in Hebrews eleven, would our names be there?

CONCLUSION

ILLUST. Charlie Brown is in a ball game. He is at bat. “Strike three!” is called. He has struck out again and slumps over to the bench. “Rats! I’ll never be a big-league player. I just don’t have it! All my life I’ve dreamed of playing in the big leagues, but I know I’ll never make it.”

Lucy tries to console him. "Charlie Brown, you're thinking too far ahead. What you need to do is set yourself more immediate goals." He looks up and says, "Immediate goals?" Lucy says, "Yes. Start with this next inning when you go out to pitch. See if you can walk out on the mound without falling down!"

We may have struck out and fallen down many times but we can begin again to walk by faith. Let us grow our faith together as we study through Hebrews 11. Let all of us determine that we will not die with our faith as weak as it was when we first became a Christian.

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