

## ***FPFWC Christian Development***



### **Learning About Faith**

January 2024

Winter Quarter

*January 6, 2024*

## Lesson #1 – Faith and Righteousness

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Hebrews 11:1-4a, 7a, 8, 17-18, 20-23, 32, 39-40

### ICE BREAKER –

1. What does it mean to walk by faith and trust God?
2. How can you manage the emotions of disappointment, grief, or anger that may arise when God’s will doesn’t make sense?
3. How should you trust God even when you can’t immediately see the results of His plans?

*Key Verse – “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.—Hebrews 11:1*

### LESSON BACKGROUND

When reading a text, it’s always a good idea to know the purpose for which it was written. The natural approach is to look for a clear purpose statement, such as in Luke 1:3–4 and John 20:30–31. The book of Hebrews, however, has no such statement. So the book’s purpose must be inferred from its contents. The extended comparisons and contrasts of Jesus with Old Testament personalities, the Levitical priesthood, angels, etc., signify the purpose being to encourage wavering and persecuted Christians of Jewish background to stand firm in Christ and not retreat into Judaism. Beyond this relatively certain conclusion, there is no consensus regarding the authorship and date of Hebrews.

At the very end of the book, the 1611 edition of the *King James Version* has this footnote: “Written to the Hebrews from Italy by Timothy.” But whether this is original to the text or the conclusion of the translators is debated.

Regarding the date of writing, we have some certainty that the book cannot have been written after AD 96 because Clement of Rome seems to quote from it up to four times while writing his epistle to the Corinthian church. The book of Hebrews also discusses the worship within the temple as though such a structure were still in existence, so a date prior to the temple’s destruction in AD 70 is likely.

Questions of authorship, date, and provenance aside, what is clear from the contents of Hebrews is that the addressees were in danger of giving up due to their suffering for having faith in Christ (Hebrews 10:32–39). Today’s study begins immediately after that danger is addressed.

### LESSON COMMENTARY

**11:1–2. Prologue.** **Faith** is not formally defined here, but what is given is a description of what **faith** does. There are two parts to the description. First, **faith** gives an **assurance of things hoped for**; i.e., the certainty of things future, such as the second coming of Christ, resurrection and glorification of the dead, being taken to heaven, etc. Second, faith provides

**the conviction of things not seen**; i.e., the persuasion of things invisible, such as the forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit living within believers, Christ as intercessor, and our access to God in prayer. These characteristics are not impractical. **For by** the possession and exercise of faith in daily life, our ancestors received divine **approval** on their lives.

**11:3–12. First “By Faith” Series.** To show that the characteristics of faith in 11:1 are not alien to any of his readership, in 11:3 the writer starts with Gn 1: **By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God.** There were no human eyewitnesses to the making of the material universe. Scripture attributes it to divine activity, and we believe it. From Heb 11:3 onward, individuals who displayed faith are mentioned. From Gn 4, **by faith** in the divine revelation that heaven requires bloody sacrifices, **Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain** (Heb 11:4), and **Cain** became enraged at God’s acceptance of his brother’s sacrifice (see the comments on Gn 4:5–7). From Gn 5, **by faith Enoch ... was pleasing to God** (Heb 11:5). This expression **by faith** means that he believed the disclosure of all the divine truth revealed to him was factual, that he conformed his character and conduct to it, and that he lived in dependency on God. With such faith, it is possible for anyone to thus please God (11:6). From Gn 6–9, **Noah** took to heart the warning about a flood that was **not yet seen** (Heb 11:7). But his faith was seen in building **an ark** that delivered **his household**. From Gn 12, convinced **by faith** about a **place** he would someday **receive**, Abraham left home before knowing the location of that place (Heb 11:8). After arriving in it, **by faith** he **lived** for decades **in the land of promise**, waiting for the Lord to give the land to him (11:9). From Gn 21, **by faith** in divine fidelity, his wife **Sarah**, though barren, **received ability to conceive** (Heb 11:11). Consequently, from this elderly, impotent couple came offspring as numerous **AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN** (11:12).

**11:17–31. Second “By Faith” Series.** Resumed here are accounts of other individuals selected from the OT, who demonstrated in life and action the faith defined in 11:1. It is not clear the extent to which Abraham believed in the doctrine of the resurrection, but his faith in God encompassed the possibility that God could restore life. God promised Abraham that Isaac, not some other son, would be the one through whom the promises of a great progeny would be fulfilled (Gn 21:12, cited in Heb 11:18). Yet Abraham set out to sacrifice Isaac at God’s command (Gn 22:2–4). His belief in God’s ability to raise one from the dead is reflected in his words in Gn 22:5, “We will worship and [*we will*] return to you.” **When he was dying** (Heb 11:22), Joseph **made mention of the** still future **exodus** of Israel, and **gave orders concerning his bones** to be buried in Canaan (Gn 50). Joseph’s faith persuaded him that departure from Egypt would come and his people would possess the promised land. Owing to the conviction that he would be the deliverer of the Jewish people (Ex 2), Moses chose **to endure ill-treatment** with the Hebrew slaves rather **than to enjoy** the prestigious but temporary luxuries of the Egyptian royal court (Heb 11:25). His attention was on future **reward**, confident that suffering in the will of God would bring **greater riches** than could **the treasures of Egypt** outside of that will (11:26). As such, Moses chose to identify with the people through whom the future Messiah would come and the reproach that came with it, rather than the life of ease of an Egyptian prince. Israel’s 40 years in the wilderness were spent in unbelief, so no examples from that period are mentioned. The writer moves on to Jos 6, where **the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled**. Nothing seems more pointless and unrelated to reality than walking

around walls **for seven days** blowing horns. But those walls were leveled **by faith** in the power of God. Because of her **faith, Rahab the harlot**, though morally stained, was cleansed and **did not perish along with** her countrymen (Heb 11:31). God had power over her heart, as He did over the walls of her city.

**11:32. Rapid “By Faith” Survey.** At this point the author realizes that he cannot keep going in detail. So he announces his intention to abbreviate by referring to believers in groups rather than as isolated individuals. Accordingly, in 11:32 he cites examples of the judges (**Gideon, Samson**, etc.), the monarchy (**David**), and the prophets (**Samuel**). It was **by their faith** that God accomplished amazing things through them. They **conquered kingdoms** as Gideon with a handful of soldiers (Jdg 7); **performed acts of righteousness** as David and Solomon; **obtained promises** as did the Patriarchs (Gn 12; 15; 17); **shut the mouths of lions** (Heb 11:33) as Daniel (Dn 6); **quenched the power of fire** as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dn 3); **escaped the edge of the sword** as did Elijah from Jezebel (1Kg 19) and Elisha from Jehoram (2Kg 6:30–33); **from weakness were made strong** as Samson (Jdg 16:28–30); **became mighty in war** as David facing Goliath (1Sm 17); **put foreign armies to flight** (Heb 11:34) like Abraham routing Chedorlaomer (Gn 14); **women received back their dead by resurrection** as did the widow of Zarephath (1Kg 17:17–24) and the Shunammite woman (2Kg 4:14–17). All those belong to the victorious category.

**11:39–40. Epilogue.** All the OT believers mentioned above received divine commendation **through their faith**. Still, they **did not receive** everything **promised** to be given through the coming of Messiah (11:39). The reason for this is that **God had provided something better for us**—a better hope, better covenant, better promises, better high priest, better access to God, better sacrifice, better possession, and a better resurrection. Heaven planned that only in company with us would they enter into these incredible benefits. Eventually the Messiah, whom OT believers anticipated, did come. Now together, both followers of Jesus the Messiah, during their earthly sojourn, and OT believers, in their heavenly city, enjoy these blessings.

**LESSON NUGGET** – Faith is confidence in God that leads to obedience to God. True faith is based on what God says and is demonstrated in what we do. People with faith do things for God, and God does things for them. Faith is not a luxury; it is a necessity. It is for common people and not just great leaders. We need faith for worshiping, as well as for working, walking, waiting, and warring. In any area of life where you ignore faith, you will sin (Romans 14:23)

***Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary***