

Riverview Baptist Church
Sunday School Teaching Plan
April 27, 2013
Hebrews 11:1-6
“What is Faith?”

Memory Verse

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Hebrews 11:1, NIV

The Big Idea:

Sermon Topic: *Learning to Trust Jesus: Part 1 – The Meaning of Faith*

Sunday School Scripture: Hebrews 11:1-6

Sunday School Title: “What is Faith?”

ESS: Faith that believes in God’s existence and character, trusts in Him, and results in obedience pleases God.

REVIEW: Last week we talked about the blood of Jesus. We focused on 2 major themes: the purpose for Jesus’ sacrifice and the benefits we receive. Review what you learned last week (*Purpose: to fulfill Old Covenant laws & sacrifice requirements; to demonstrate His unconditional love. Benefits: forgiveness, righteousness, reconciliation.*)

This week, we’re moving our focus to faith. In fact, the next few weeks will be spent studying Hebrews chapter 11 and discussing the basics of faith.

How would you define faith? Is faith different from belief? Describe a time when your faith was tested and strengthened.

Hebrews 11 is sometimes known as the Faith Hall of Fame. Here, several Biblical characters are mentioned and commended for their faith. But before we can learn about these individuals, we first need to discuss the meaning of faith.

READ Hebrews 11:1-6

FAITH

1. FAITH IS COMBINED WITH HOPE

What is the difference between faith and hope? What are some things you hope for? What are some things you have faith in?

Hebrews 11:1 says “*faith is being SURE of what we hope for.*” Sometimes we use the word hope to indicate wishful thinking. For example we might say, “I *hope* it doesn’t rain tomorrow” when we know there’s actually an 80% chance of rain in tomorrow’s forecast. We may *hope* it doesn’t rain, but it probably will. This use of *hope* is vague and even empty. It indicates a wish without confidence. Or we might say, “I *hope* I don’t get sick” when all the other members of our household are throwing up. This use of *hope* indicates an uncertain future (and good luck with the germs). In the Bible, however, the word hope indicates waiting on something with joy and confident expectation. Biblical hope means waiting with certainty. In other words, when you see the word *hope* in the Bible, it means to wait for something that WILL happen.

So when Hebrews 11:1 links *faith* with *hope*, this is serious business. Faith is a conviction of truth –knowing the truth beyond a shadow of doubt. Biblical *hope* already involves certainty and confidence about what’s coming. To combine the confidence of *hope* with the conviction of *faith* is to build a foundational unit that will hold up a fortress. A Christian *hopes* (waits confidently) for God’s promises to be fulfilled in the future. *Faith* (knowing the truth with absolute certainty) assures him NOW that these promises WILL come to pass. A life built on *faith* and *hope* in God will remain unshakable, no matter what storms besiege it.

2. FAITH BELIEVS IN GOD'S EXISTANCE AND CHARACTER

So where does a strong faith come from? Biblical faith is grounded in God's character. If faith means having an unshakable conviction of truth, then our truth is based on God's unchangeable character as revealed in the Bible. If the object of our faith was unstable or fickle, our faith would be difficult to maintain. It's hard to trust in someone who changes often or is undependable. On the other hand, our faith is placed in the almighty, holy, perfect, and unchanging God of the Bible who is the creator and sustainer of truth.

Have you ever had faith in someone who later disappointed you or violated your trust? Why can our faith in God be stronger than our faith in people? Is it possible for God to ever disappoint us? Will God ever fail to keep His word?

Hebrews 11:6 says that those who have faith must believe that "God exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him." This tells us that the first work of faith is to believe in God's existence as the Bible reveals it. To have faith, we must believe that God is the self-sufficient, omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent creator of the universe. He is the source and sustainer of life. Without Him, we have nothing. But this is just the beginning of faith. Once we believe in God's existence, we must believe in His character – that He earnestly rewards those who seek Him. We must believe, as the Bible tells us, that God is a promise keeper and rewarder. He faithfully keeps His promises and upholds His word. He blesses and rewards those who seek Him. His reward is revealing Himself and making Himself available and approachable for His people. This is faith. Knowing the truth about God's existence and knowing the truth about God's character.

3. FAITH IS TRUST

But faith goes past just believing. Faith is having such a strong conviction about something that you place your complete trust in it. Faith is putting all your eggs in one basket, and being totally at peace about it. Hebrews 11:1 says faith is "being certain of what we do not see." The Greek word here for *being certain* means to have hard evidence or proof for something. Think about it. If a crime is committed, only evidence can point to a perpetrator. The more evidence there is, the stronger the proof is. In Hebrews 11:6, the Greek indicates the presence of credible evidence and unquestionable proof for what we cannot see. So faith provides full assurance of God's existence and character, even when we can't see it with our eyes. Just like solid evidence provides strong proof and eventually guide us to the truth, faith gives us the evidence we need to completely trust God. Faith isn't just simple knowing. It's confident knowing that translates to total reliance and complete trust.

So how is faith different from just simple belief? In your own life, you may believe in God, but do you completely trust and rely on Him? Why is it sometimes difficult for us to depend on Him instead of ourselves?

4. FAITH RESULTS IN OBEDIENCE

In Hebrews 11:4-5 and then verses 7-40, specific people are mentioned because their faith led to action.

Take a moment and skim through Hebrews 11. Name some of the people listed. Which of these is a personal favorite for you?

These Biblical heroes are commended not for silent, dormant faith that stayed in the heart and mind. These heroes possessed a real faith that overflowed from their hearts and minds and leaked into their lives. Their faith motivated them to go places and do things that didn't always make sense – all out of obedience to God. Real faith results in actions that obey God.

READ James 2:14 & 26

As James tells us, faith without deeds or obedient actions is dead. So faith is not only a conviction of truth that leads to trust in God. Faith trusts in God so much that it is willing to go or do whatever God wants. Faith manifests itself in our lives – in what we say, in what we do, in how we spend our time, energy & money, and in the decisions we make.

In your own life, are you motivated by faith? Does your life tell others "GOD IS IN CHARGE"?

5. FAITH PLEASES GOD

Hebrews 11:6 says, "without faith it is impossible to please God." Not only does our faith please God, but without it, it's IMPOSSIBLE to please Him. When we trust God and live lives of faith, it glorifies and pleases Him. Think about a master ship-builder who spends years planning and building a ship. He's an expert, and gives careful attention to crafting each detail of the ship. Not only is the result a safe and reliable ship, but it's beautiful to behold. When the master ship-builder presents the finished ship to his best friend as a gift, the best friend simply shrugs his shoulders. Instead of sailing the Pacific in this grand gift of a ship, the ship-builder's friend opts to use his own small, worn, dented, barely-sea-worthy dingy to cross the ocean. Can you imagine the sorrow and rejection felt by the ship-builder? Now change the story's ending a bit. Imagine that the friend's reaction to the gift was different. Imagine that, upon receiving the glorious ship as a gift, the friend immediately packed supplies and moved onto the ship. Without any hesitation, doubt, or fear, the friend was ready and willing to sail the seas in this masterfully built ship. He couldn't set sail fast enough!!! Now with this reaction, imagine how the ship-builder must feel. How fulfilling and joyful to see his friend receive the gift with such enthusiasm and to watch him express such trust in the ship's dependability! This is how God feels when we reject or accept Him. When we have faith in Him, trust Him with our lives, and live in obedience to Him, it brings Him great joy. Just as the friend's trust in the ship brought a smile to the ship-builder's face, our faith brings joy to God's heart. Our faith pleases God.

CONCLUSION: Faith that believes in God's existence and character, trusts in Him, and results in obedience pleases God.

APPLY: As Christians, we all have faith in God. But does the faith we have please Him? This week, evaluate the elements of your faith.

1. Do you truly believe in the existence and character of God as described in the Bible? Are there any specific traits of God that bother or confuse you?
2. Do you completely trust God with all areas of your life? Are there any areas you are holding back? Are there any situations where you refuse to rely on Him?
3. Does your faith translate into a lifestyle of obedience? Has God recently told you to do something that you've failed to do? How does God want you to exercise your faith in obedience today?

STUDY NOTES:

(These are for your personal study. This is NOT the lesson.)

Study Guide by David Guzik, 2001. Available online: www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david

Now faith is the substance: Just as our physical eyesight is the sense that gives us evidence of the material world, **faith** is the "sense" that gives us evidence of the invisible, spiritual world. Faith has its reasons. We aren't talking about a "blind leap" of faith. But the reasons can't be measured in a laboratory, they have to be understood spiritually. "Faith extends beyond what we learn from our senses, and the author is saying that it has its reasons. Its tests are not those of the senses, which yield uncertainty." (Morris)

Of things hoped for ... of things not seen: If you have the substance before you, if you can see it, what use is there for **faith**? Faith is needed for what we *can't* see and *can't* touch. Faith does not contradict reason, though it may go beyond reason. I may objectively prove the Bible is the most unique book ever published, and has impacted society more than any other book. But only faith can *prove* that the Bible is the *Word of God*. Therefore, this is a belief *beyond* reason, but not in *contradiction* to reason.

Faith is the substance ... the evidence: Faith is *not* a bare belief or intellectual understanding. It is a willingness to trust in, to rely on, and to cling to.

For by it the elders: The great examples of godliness all had different circumstances and personalities, but they all had one thing in common - faith. **Obtained a good testimony:** These Jewish Christians had been discouraged, and were thinking of giving up on Jesus and a distinctive Christianity. They needed **a good testimony**, and so they needed these examples of faith to break them out of discouragement.

By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word: How were **the worlds ... framed by the word of God**? It happened when God simply commanded *Let there be light* (Genesis 1:3). As the Psalmist explains: *By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth ... For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.*" (Psalm 33:6,9)

By faith we understand: We did not see this act of creation; we only know of it by **faith**. We also know this by *reason*, because we know the world was created, and created by an intelligent Designer. Again, this is faith going *beyond*, but not in *contradiction* to reason. Even in times when it seems when God expects a faith that contradicts reason, closer examination reveals He does not. For example, it might seem contrary to reason for God to expect Abraham to believe that Sarah's dead womb could bring forth a child. But it is not unreasonable to believe that the God who created life and the womb could do this, and would do it according to His promise.

By faith we understand: This text *does not* say that God created the world with **faith**. Since God sees and knows all things, "faith" in a human sense is superfluous to Him. If faith is *the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*, what does God not see? What possibly could a sovereign Being "hope" for?

So that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible: Most scientists at the time Hebrews was written believed the universe was created out of existing matter, not out of nothing, not out of **things which are visible**. But the Bible corrects this misunderstanding.

By faith Able offered to God a more excellent sacrifice: The difference between the sacrifice of Cain and the sacrifice of Abel (Genesis 4:3-5) was not because one was animal, the other was vegetable. The difference was that Abel's sacrifice was made **by faith**. "Abel's sacrifice was preferred to his brother's for no other reason than that it was sanctified by faith; for surely the fat of brute animals did not smell so sweetly, that it could, by its odour, pacify God." (Calvin)

God testifying of his gifts: How did God testify of Abel's gifts? It is likely that God showed His pleasure with Abel's sacrifice by consuming it with fire from heaven, as happened at the dedication of tabernacle (Leviticus 9:24), the temple (2 Chronicles 7:1) and upon offerings made by David (1 Chronicles 21:26) and Elijah (1 Kings 18:38).

Through it he being dead still speaks: Right off with his example of Abel, the writer reminds us that faith is not necessarily rewarded on earth. But God Himself testifies to the righteousness of the faithful. Abel's blood still speaks to us, reminding us of the value of eternity!

By faith Enoch: Enoch is one of the mystery men of the Old Testament being mentioned only in Genesis 5:21-24 as the man who *walked with God and he was not, for God took him*. **By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death:** The writer to the Hebrews assumes that only a man of faith could enjoy close communion with God. Obviously, anyone who had this kind of fellowship with God must have pleased God, and in pleasing God, Enoch fulfilled the purpose for which man was created (Revelation 4:11).

But without faith it is impossible to please Him: This is the basic faith required of any who will seek God. One must **believe that He is**, and one must believe **He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him**. We must believe that God is there, and that He will reveal Himself to the seeking heart. The writer to the Hebrews doesn't say that it is *difficult* to please God without faith. He says that it is **impossible**. "These two elements seem most simple, but, alas, how many professing Christians act as if God were not living; and how many others, though seeking after Him, are not *expecting from Him* as Rewarder!" (Newell)