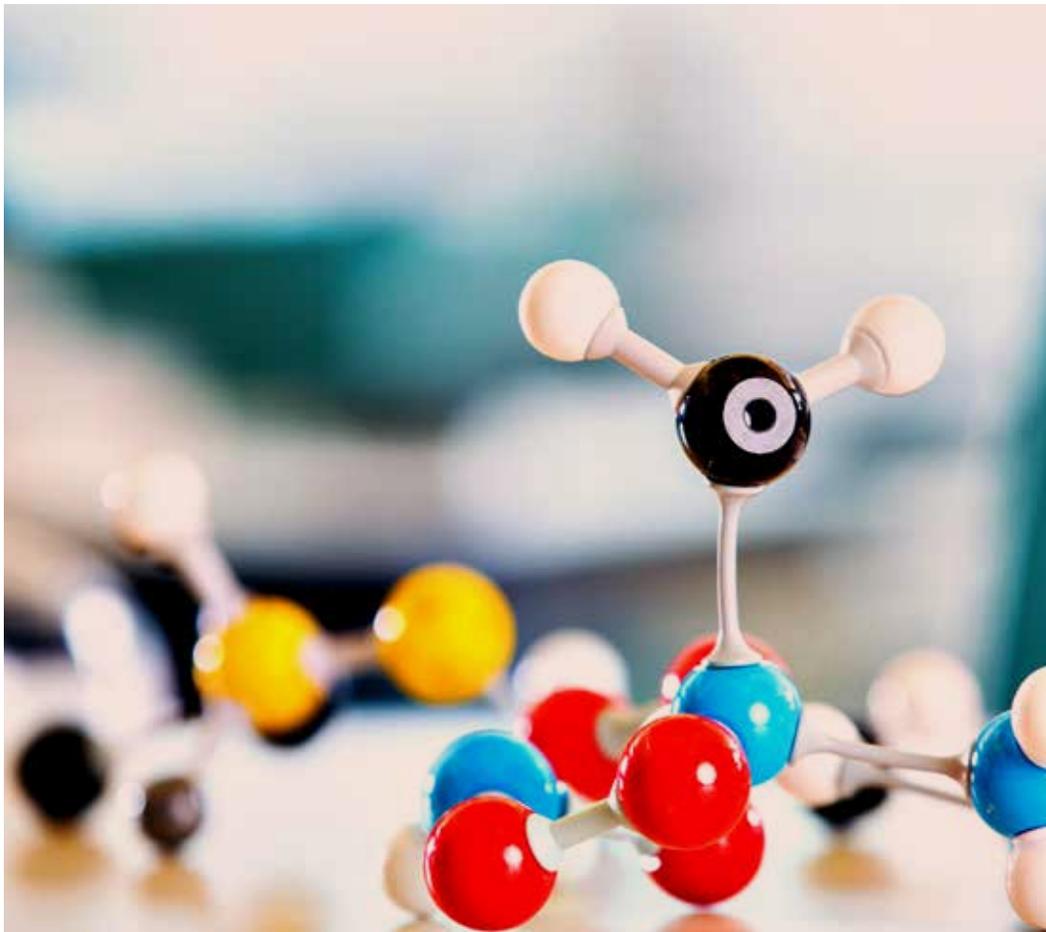


SESSION 4
Faith



QUESTION 1:

What are some things you've never seen but still believe exist?

THE POINT

We can confidently trust in what God says and does.

THE PASSAGE

Hebrews 11:1-6

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

It's hard to know what to believe anymore. The Internet is filled with “news” on topics that range from politics to medicine to conspiracies, and all the writers tout their stories as truth—even though the “facts” they present contradict each other. If you doubt what you read, someone will offer this jewel:

**“It may sound hard to believe, but just accept it as true.
Take it on faith.”**

Really?

Is faith just jumping blindly into something we want to be true—or is it something more? Throughout the Bible, we see a whole different idea of faith. The writer of Hebrews captured the essence of faith in a single chapter. In Hebrews 11, we see individuals whose faith was grounded in something solid: a faithful God who could be fully trusted.

Let's embrace a different understanding of faith from what the world describes. Faith isn't believing something without substance. Hebrews 11 shows us real life examples of people who faced overwhelming situations and expressed a faith grounded in God.

Hebrews 11:1-3

1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

2 For by it the elders obtained a good report.

3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

Since the Christian life is a life of faith, let's be very clear on what faith is. Verse 1 describes how faith works and what it does.

- 1. Faith gives us confidence.** Faith has substance. It's an assurance based on the reality of what God has done and said.
- 2. Faith is an inward conviction.** We trust God and know He will do what He says He will do—because He always does.

Want an example? Let's start at the beginning with the creation of the universe. The universe exists. It's here for us to touch, see, and explore. Yet, for all we have learned and keep learning about creation, science simply can't answer the most fundamental questions about its existence. While we would all agree the universe exists, not everyone knows why and how it came to exist. Is the universe merely a giant cosmic accident? Or is there some purpose or plan?

Christians know the answers to the "why" and "how" questions because of our faith. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God." He did it to provide a place where we could enjoy a relationship with Him. We can only understand this dimension of reality by hearing God's Word and believing what He said.

God spoke, and we take Him at His word. That's faith.

By studying nature, we can understand some things about the Person of God; in the same way, studying a great work of art

will tell us something about the artist. The early church fathers considered nature the second “book” of God. Consider then, what God’s “work of art”—the universe—tells us about Him.

- ▶ The massive size and scope of the universe points to God, who is all-powerful.
- ▶ The details in nature and the intricacies of our own bodies point to God, who has infinite wisdom.
- ▶ The constant laws of the universe point to God, who is constant and unchanging.

Our universe isn’t some accident of physics; it is the intentional work of God who reveals Himself first as Creator. As we understand God was faithful in the beginning in His work of creation, we then can believe He will be faithful to the future of His creation.

To highlight his point, the writer of Hebrews reminded us God made everything from nothing: “things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” God spoke and the universe came to be. In spite of what some people think, the powerful creative work of God does not contradict scientific evidence. Faith—that firm conviction in what God said—points us to the “why” behind all that scientific evidence: God spoke.

God began with nothing and brought all that exists into being from nothing. We can be confident and have faith God will continue to work His will in our world—and in our lives.

QUESTION 2:

What helps you have faith in God even though you can’t see Him?

Hebrews 11:4

4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

After the writer described *faith* in verses 1-3, he gave us several examples of those who demonstrated such faith. He provided a list of people who responded to God's word and work in their lives—and they responded “by faith.” These heroes of faith were people just like us who saw God working in their world and found ways—sometimes dramatic and courageous ways—to join God in His work. The message is clear: these people trusted God and endured confidently in Him. We can do the same.

The first real-life example of faith comes from the life of Abel. Abel's full story is recorded in Genesis 4:1-10; even unchurched people may be somewhat familiar with the story of Cain killing his brother Abel. Why did Cain kill his brother in a jealous rage? God accepted Abel's offering, but “unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect” (v. 5).

What was the difference in their two offerings? We aren't told much, but the text offers hints. Abel was careful to choose the best of his flock to offer to God (v. 4). Cain seems to have been careless in what he chose to offer to God (v. 3). It wasn't the offerings themselves that made them acceptable or unacceptable; it was the attitudes behind those offerings.

As noted earlier, faith is confidence and trust in God; it is a response to who God is, what He says, and how He has worked. Abel expressed that confidence and trust—his faith—through his worship. His faith in God affected the way he made his offering. In his faith, Abel was sure to choose the best he had to bring before God.

When my dad was forty years old, he was diagnosed with a fast-growing malignant cancer in his neck. Soon after the diagnosis, we met as a family, and with tears streaming down his face, my father told us he didn't know if he was going to live or die. He concluded our family meeting by saying he trusted the Lord and believed God would use this cancer for His glory and my father's good.

I was just a teenage boy, and from my immature perspective, I thought my dad would have been completely justified in balling up a fist and shaking it at God in anger. Instead, I watched my dad walk to the backyard where he stood all alone. He raised his hands in the air, not to curse God, but to praise Him. In that moment, I heard my father pray out loud, "God, I know that this cancer couldn't have gotten to me unless it first went through you. So in that assurance I praise you and I trust you."

Because my dad is a pastor, I've heard him preach thousands of sermons, but to this day, that backyard proclamation is by far the most powerful. Because of my father's faith, he was able to respond in worship even in the darkest moment of his life. When we have faith in God, a natural response is to worship Him.

Cain presents a different picture. He apparently did not show the same worshipful trust in God. Cain had no faith in God, and as a result, his offering was a ritual, not a true act of faith and worship. Cain's offering simply didn't mean much to him; therefore, it didn't mean much to God.

Our confidence that God alone is God and no one is like Him affects our choices and actions. Since no one is greater than God, why would we want to bring less than our best to Him? Abel understood this.

QUESTION 3:

What's the relationship between faith and genuine worship?

Hebrews 11:5-6

5 By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

The writer of Hebrews referred to Enoch for his second example of a person who lived by faith. We know very little about Enoch, but what we do know is extraordinary.

The entire fifth chapter of Genesis is a genealogy that introduces us to another man of faith, Noah (Heb. 11:7; Gen. 5:29-32; 6:1–9:29). As we read through the genealogy, we get the impression that life seemed to go on pretty normally: people were born, got married, had children, and died. But then we come to Enoch (Gen. 5:21-24). Enoch was the father of Methuselah—the oldest person recorded in Scripture—and then when Enoch was 365 years old, “he was not; for God took him” (v. 24). “God had translated him.” He never died. He simply went from walking with God in this life to walking with God in eternity. That’s all we’re told. The writer of Hebrews wrote that Enoch’s faith was the key to this new reality: “he pleased God.”

Like any good teacher, the writer of Hebrews stopped to emphasize his point. He made his point rather bluntly as if he were trying to make sure we’re paying attention: “But without faith it is impossible to please him.”

Why is that? The church has often stressed the priority of faith over works, and this passage helps us understand why faith takes priority. Without faith, works would never happen. We have no motivation to do anything if we don’t “believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” We live as we live

because we know God exists. We do what we do because we are sure God is there. We live to please God because we believe God will reward those who seek him.

DIGGING DEEPER

ENOCH: A PORTRAIT OF FAITH

Genesis says Enoch “walked with God” (vv. 22,24). Genesis 5 presents a genealogical record beginning with Adam and continuing through Noah’s sons. Using a basic pattern, the genealogical record gives a man’s name, states how old he was when he fathered a specific son, and then describes how long the man lived after the son’s birth and/or how old he was when he died. The record of Enoch’s life, breaks this pattern. Something about Enoch’s life was so distinct that it deserved to be highlighted. Enoch’s record

adds the descriptor that he walked with God. This is the only time the genealogy makes any statement about an individual’s character.

Genesis twice says that Enoch “walked with God” (vv. 22,24). This walk set Enoch apart. The Hebrew word translated *walk* indicates a “communion or intimacy with God.” This Hebrew word highlights that Enoch “walked ‘back and forth’ with God.” This means Enoch had an ongoing communion and intimacy with God. This was not a one-time event but a pattern or lifestyle of closeness with the Father.

Shawn L. Buice, “Enoch: A Portrait of Faith,” *Biblical Illustrator*, Spring 2017, 42-44.

QUESTION 4:

What are the rewards and challenges of living by faith?

And what reward do we seek? Riches? Fame? No, we don’t want anything so shallow or insignificant. We want the victory God gave Enoch—an eternity of walking with God. We seek God because we want the kinds of rewards only He can give. That is what Paul sought.

“Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8).

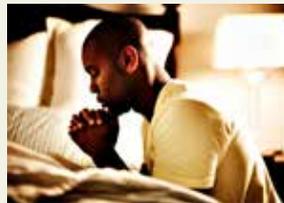
Faith opens up our understanding to see that we find a different reality in the presence of God. We find everything that is truly important in His presence: things like peace, love, joy, and hope. All that truly makes life worth living is found in the presence of Christ. We believe only God possesses these things and only He can make them part of our lives. Faith—confidence in who God is and what His coming kingdom has in store for His people—causes us to live our lives now the way we will live one day in heaven: a life of victory.

QUESTION 5:

Based on this passage, how would you summarize what it means to live a life of faith?

ENGAGE

Choose one of the following images that best represents faith.



Why does this image best represent faith for you?

What are some other ways faith has been revealed in your life?

LIVE IT OUT

How will you live out your faith this week?

- ▶ **Thank God for faith.** Thank God for bringing you to faith in Christ. Acknowledge your belief in Him and seek to please Him in how you live out your faith.
- ▶ **Walk in faith.** Choose to walk in obedience to Christ. Daily read God's Word, and identify areas in which you need to walk in faith and obedience.
- ▶ **Express your faith.** As you live in obedient faith, ask God for opportunities to tell someone else why you believe in Him and choose to live by faith in Christ.

