

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 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 that which 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.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

HEBREWS 11:1-3

¹ Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen. ² For by it our ancestors won God's approval. ³ By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

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.

- ▶ **Faith gives us confidence.** Faith has substance. It's an assurance based on the reality of what God has done and said.
- ▶ **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, 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. "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God" (v. 3). 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 has said. God spoke, and we take Him at His word. That's faith.

QUESTION 2:

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

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. 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. 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 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.

HEBREWS 11:4

⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was approved as a righteous man, because God approved his gifts, and even though he is dead, he still speaks through his faith.

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 to join God in His work. The message is clear: these people trusted God and endured confidently in Him. So can we.

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 Abel in a jealous rage? God accepted Abel’s offering, “but he did not have regard for Cain and his offering” (v. 5). What was the difference in their two offerings? We aren’t told much, but the text offers hints. Abel

A PICTURE OF FAITH

Choose one of the following images that best represents faith. Then answer the question.



Why does this image best represent faith for you?

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

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”

2 CORINTHIANS 5:7

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.

QUESTION 3:
What's the relationship between faith and genuine worship?

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 through his worship. His faith in God affected the way he made his offering. By faith, Abel was sure to choose the best he had to bring before God.

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 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?

HEBREWS 11:5-6

⁵ By faith Enoch was taken away, and so he did not experience death. He was not to be found because God took him away. For before he was taken away, he was approved as one who pleased God. ⁶ Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who 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 prepares to introduce us to another man of faith named Noah (Heb. 11:7; see also Gen. 6:1–9:29). As we read through the genealogy, we get the impression that life

seemed to go on normally: people were born, got married, had children, and died.

But then there was 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 there” (v. 24). “God took him away.” 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. Hebrews tells us that Enoch's faith was the key to this new reality.

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: "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (v. 6).

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. There's no motivation to do anything if we don't "believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." We live the way 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.

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 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.

"More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:8a).



Faith opens our understanding to see a different reality in the presence of God. We find everything that is important in His presence: peace, love, joy, and hope. All that 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 causes us to live our lives now the way we will live one day in heaven. This is a life of victory.

QUESTION 5:

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



LIVE IT OUT

How will you live out your faith this week? Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **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 by 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.

All of us find ourselves in situations that just seem overwhelming sometimes. It is at those times when it's most important that our faith is grounded in Christ who is faithful.