

**WHAT FAITH IS**  
**Hebrews 11:1-3**  
**The Faith Chapter – Week 1**  
**By Andy Manning**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

1. Today we are going to begin a study through Hebrews 11, one of the most famous chapters in the Bible.
2. Hebrews 11 is all about faith. It begins with a description of faith in first three verses, and then it illustrates faith by telling the stories of a number of Old Testament characters.
3. Hebrews 11 has been called the Hall of Faith; God's Great Hall of Fame; The Heroes of Faith; The Honor Roll of the Old Testament Saints; The Westminster Abbey of Scripture; or simply, the Faith Chapter. That's what we're going to call this study, because Hebrews 11 is all about faith. Faith is essential for the Christian life, and if you want to learn about faith, then Hebrews 11 is the place to go.
4. The big idea of Hebrews 11 is to encourage Christians to stand firm in the faith in the face of hardship. To keep the faith even if life gets really hard.
5. To teach these Christians about faith, the author (unknown) begins with a description of faith.
6. **Hebrews 11:1-3** "Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen. 2 For by this our ancestors were approved. 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."
7. This passage gives us three insights about faith.

**II. THREE INSIGHTS ABOUT FAITH**

**1. The definition of faith.**

- i. What is biblical faith?
- ii. There are many wrong ideas about biblical faith?

1. Faith is not positive thinking.

- a. There's a poem that describes well the importance of positive thinking. I'm not sure who wrote it.

*If you think you are beaten, you are.*

*If you think you dare not, you don't.*

*If you want to win but think you can't,*

*It is almost a cinch you won't.*

*If you think you'll lose, you've lost.*

*For out of the world we find*

*That success begins with a fellow's will;*

*It's all in the state of mind.*

*Life's battles don't always go*

*To the stronger or the faster man;  
But sooner or later the man that wins  
Is the one who think he can.*

- b. I agree with this poem. Positive thinking, or possibility thinking is very important. If you don't believe that something is possible then you won't try, or you will give up. If you don't believe that you can make the team, then you won't try out.
  - c. But faith is not the same as positive thinking. If someone says, "I'm not going to try out for the team because I don't think I'll make it," you can't say, "You gotta have faith!" Faith in what? Themselves? Why? They might be right; they might not be good enough to make the team. You can say, "Be positive! You might make it. You won't know until you try!" But you can't say, "Have faith." Biblical faith is not the same as positive thinking.
2. Faith is not mere strong belief.
- a. Years ago I read this illustration about faith (Bill Bright, *Living Supernaturally in Christ*, 27.) Several years ago, a farming community found itself in the midst of a drought. The once hearty soil had become as hard as bronze in the unrelenting sun. The parched crops lay wilted, and the anxious farmers grumbled at the incessantly cloudless skies. Finally, the ministers of the community scheduled an hour of prayer in the town square at noon on a Saturday. They encouraged the townspeople to bring objects of faith as an inspiration. On Saturday, the town square was brimming with people. Their faces filled with anticipation, their hearts hopeful, they clutched their 'objects of faith' – Bibles, Soaries, crosses. The hour of prayer ended and, as if on command, clouds appeared and a gentle rain began to fall. The townspeople cheered and held up their treasured objects in praise and thankfulness. In the middle of the joyous crowd, one object of faith stood out from the others. A nine-year-old child had brought an umbrella. The point of the story is that the little boy had true faith, because he brought an umbrella. He is the only one who expected God to answer their prayers.
  - b. There's a problem with that story. If the little boy brought an umbrella because he believed God hears prayers and answers prayers, and He just might answer the prayer for rain on the spot, then that's good. But if the little boy brought an umbrella because he believed God was definitely going to

answer their prayer, his faith was misguided. Why? Because God didn't promise to answer that prayer. He didn't promise that He would provide rain when and where you ask for it.

- c. The little boy may have had strong belief, but that's not biblical faith. You can strongly believe something, but that doesn't make it true. You can strongly believe that you won't get hit by a car if you walk into the intersection, but that doesn't mean won't get hit. You can strongly believe that God will heal you of your illness, but that doesn't mean it's true. You can strongly believe in a false god, but that doesn't mean it is real.
  - d. Biblical faith is not so much about how strong you believe, but in what you believe. It's about the object of your faith. Faith is only as good as its object. Biblical faith is trusting in God, and specifically in what God has promised. If God has promised it, then you can bank on it. But if God has not specifically promised it, but you strongly believe it, that's not Biblical faith. That's just strong belief.
  - e. Maybe you've heard of the little children's book, *The Little Engine That Could*. The little engine was going up the hill saying, "I think I can, I think I can." People think if they say, "I believe God will, I believe God will," then God will act. That's not faith; that's presumption. You are presuming to know God's will. Faith is believing that God will do what he has promised to do, not what you want Him to do. When you pray for healing, or for a promotion, or that a marriage will be healed, we may not be praying according to God's will. We can pray boldly, but we need to humbly trust God to do His will.
3. Faith is not believing despite the evidence.
    - a. Some people contrast faith with reason, as if they are enemies. You are either a person of faith, or a person of reason, and logic, and evidence.
    - b. This is what a lot of atheists think about faith.
    - c. **Philosopher Peter Boghossian** said, "[Faith is] pretending to know what you don't." (*A Manual for Creating Atheists*.)
    - d. **Sam Harris**, an influential atheist author wrote, "Faith is nothing more than the license that religious people give one another to believe such propositions when reasons fail...." (Sam Harris, "Science Must Destroy Religion," Huffington Post,

May 25, 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sam-harris/science-must-destroy-reli\\_b\\_13153.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sam-harris/science-must-destroy-reli_b_13153.html).)

- e. **Richard Dawkins** “Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence.”
  - f. But biblical faith is not believing despite the evidence. It is based upon reason and evidence. The Bible says that we must be ready to tell people the reasons for our faith (1 Pt 3:15).
  - g. In other words, we believe because of the many reasons to believe. We believe because of the evidence.
  - h. We don’t believe in God despite the evidence. We believe because there is too much evidence to be an atheist.
  - i. We don’t believe in Jesus despite the evidence. We believe because there is so much evidence for the resurrection that it would be foolish to deny Christ.
  - j. Frank Turek wrote a popular book on apologetics called *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*. The title says it all. There is so much evidence for the existence of God and the resurrection of Christ that it would be unreasonable to be an atheist.
4. Faith is not an emotional crutch.
    - a. Some people might say, “I have no reason to believe in God, or to believe in heaven, but I have to believe because thought of a world without God is too scary; or the thought of no afterlife is too depressing.”
    - b. In other words, some people believe because it gives them comfort.
    - c. We don’t believe in spiritual things because they give us comfort.
    - d. It’s true, faith does bring much comfort, but we don’t believe to find comfort. We believe because of the evidence. We believe reason tells that the Bible is true, and that God is worthy of our trust.
  5. Faith is not a force.
    - a. This is the most destructive false idea about faith.
    - b. This idea is taught by teachers of the Word-Faith movement, or the Word of Faith movement, or the Faith movement, otherwise known as the prosperity gospel, or the health and wealth gospel. The main teachers are Joel Osteen, Kenneth

Copeland, Creflo Dollar, Joyce Meyer, and many other popular tv preachers.

- c. They teach three main ideas about faith:
  - i. God wants you to be healthy, wealthy, and prosperous all the time.
  - ii. To receive these promises from God, you must have faith. If are not experiencing health, wealth, and prosperity, it is because you don't have enough faith. If you are poor, you lack faith. If you have cancer, you lack faith.
  - iii. To exercise faith, you must name it and claim it. Blab it and grab it. This is called positive confession. God created the universe by speaking it into existence. He said, "Let there be light (Gen 1:3)." Through a relationship with Jesus Christ, we too have the ability to speak things into existence; to create our reality with the words of our mouth. Therefore, to exercise faith and claim what is rightfully yours, you must boldly and confidently confess it is yours. For example, "I am rich. I am wealthy. God has made me prosperous." At the same time, to exercise faith you must not speak anything negative, because there is power in our words. Faith is a force, and our words are like containers that release faith to do its work. So we must not say things like, "I'm failing my class. I might fail my class. I have cancer. I may not get better. We might not get the contract." If you confess something negative, it will come to pass. I have seen a lot of Christians adopt some of these ideas. If you say something negative, they'll stop you and correct you. "Don't say that! You have to believe." It's as if there is power in the actual words. That's not faith. That's magic. That's superstition.
- d. Positive Confession, or Word-Faith theology is a heresy. First, God doesn't promise to make you healthy, wealthy, and prosperous. Just read about all the heroes of the faith in the Bible and in Christian history and see all of the suffering they endured for Christ. Not because they lacked faith, but often because of their faith in Christ, they suffered terribly. You may pray for it, but God hasn't guaranteed it. Second, suffering is not a sign that you lack faith. Jesus suffered. Did He lack

faith? The apostle Paul suffered. Was that because he lacked faith? Eleven of the twelve apostles were put to executed. Was that because they lacked faith? We do not have the power to create our own reality; to call things into existence. God does. Our words don't have creative power in them. Our words can hurt or help people; but they don't have creative energy.

- iii. Hebrews 11:1 tells us exactly what faith is.
- iv. **Hebrews 11:1** "Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen."
- v. What does this verse mean?
- vi. First, look at the word "reality." My CSB Bible has a footnote that says it can also be translated "assurance." Next look at the word "proof." My CSB Bible has a footnote that says it can also be translated "conviction." That's how the ESV and NASB 1995 translate it. The ESV says, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." That makes much more sense. Faith is assurance, certainty, conviction, of things hoped for, and of what is not seen.
- vii. In other words, faith is confidence in God, that He is who He says He is, and that He will do what He says He will do.
- viii. Notice that faith is not just confidence. It is confidence in God. It is not confidence in yourself, or in your abilities, or in your words, but in God and His ability.
- ix. Notice also that it is confidence in what God has said – who He said He is, and what He said He would do. We are not confident that God is who we say He is, but that God is who He says He is. We are not confident that God will do what we want Him to do, or what we say He will do; we are confident that He will do what He says He will do.
- x. Hebrews 11:1 tells that faith gives us two kinds of confidence.
  - 1. Future confidence.
    - a. **Hebrews 11:1** "Now faith is the assurance of what is hoped for..."
    - b. Faith is being sure of what you hope for.
    - c. What do we hope for? All the things that God has promised.
    - d. What has God promised? Not to make you healthy, wealthy, and prosperous. But He has promised to provide for us, to help us grow in Christ, to answer our prayers, to work all things together for our good, to comfort us in our trials so that we can comfort others, to bring us to heaven when we die, to give us eternal life, to give us a new glorified body, to give us eternal rewards, that Jesus will come back, that He will defeat

sin, Satan, and death, and that He will create a new heavens and earth where we will live with Him forever.

- e. Faith is the confidence, the assurance, the certainty that what we hope for will come to pass.

2. Visual confidence.

- a. **Hebrews 11:1** "...the conviction of what is not seen."
  - b. Faith is confidence in the reality of the things that God says are real, but we haven't experienced with our five senses. Like what? Faith is confidence that God is real, that Jesus is real, that Satan and demons are real, that angels are real, that heaven and hell are real, etc.
  - c. **Charles Stanley** "Trusting God means looking beyond what we can see to what God sees."
  - d. **Tony Evans** "If all you see is what you see, you will never see all that there is to be seen." (*Victory in Spiritual Warfare.*)
- xi. So, faith is confidence in God. In fact, the word "assurance" can refer to the foundation on which pillars would be set. In other words, faith is a concrete assurance that what we hope for will happen.
  - xii. Take a closer look at the word "conviction."
  - xiii. **Hebrews 11:1** "Now faith is the reality (or *assurance*) of what is hoped for, the proof (or *conviction*) of what is not seen."
  - xiv. Faith is not only confidence, it is conviction. What is conviction? Conviction means doing something as a result of what you believe. It means believing God and acting accordingly.
  - xv. True faith acts on what it believes. True faith works its way into your conduct, your character, your attitude.
  - xvi. **Warren Wiersbe** said, "What does it mean to walk by faith? It means to obey God's Word in spite of the feelings within us, the circumstances around us, and the consequences before us." (*On Earth as it is in Heaven*, p. 29.)
  - xvii. Notice the close connection between faith and obedience. True faith obeys God. Where there is no obedience, there is no faith.
  - xviii. So, when you take these two words together – assurance and conviction – it means that faith is confidence in God and the conviction to act accordingly.

**2. The reward of faith.**

- i. Verse 2 tells us why faith is so important.
- ii. **Hebrews 11:2** "For by this our ancestors were approved."
- iii. The word "ancestors" can also be translated "elders," and it refers to all the Old Testament heroes of the faith.
- iv. What does the word "approved" mean?
  - 1. CEV: It was their faith that made our ancestors pleasing to God.
  - 2. GW: God accepted our ancestors because of their faith.

- 3. NTMS: For by it the saints of old won God's approval.
- v. In other words, "For by faith the heroes of the OT pleased God."
- vi. What is the reward of faith? Faith is how we please God.
- vii. Why do we want to please God?
  - 1. To be obedient.
    - a. **1 Thessalonians 4:1 (NLT)** "Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus to live in a way that pleases God, as we have taught you. You live this way already, and we encourage you to do so even more."
  - 2. To be like Christ.
    - a. **John 8:29** "The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, because I always do what pleases him."
  - 3. To be grateful.
    - a. **Romans 12:1** "Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship."
    - b. What is the motivation for pleasing God? "In view of the mercies of God." We don't strive to please God to earn a place in heaven, but because in Christ He has already reserved a place in heaven for us. We don't strive to please God to earn His forgiveness, but because through Christ He has already forgiven us. We don't strive to please God to earn adoption into His family, but because in Christ we have already been adopted.
- viii. So, we want to please God, but we cannot please God without faith. We see this a little later in the chapter.
- ix. **Hebrews 11:6** "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."
- x. Why do we need faith to please God? The Christian life requires faith from start to finish.
  - 1. Without faith we cannot be saved.
    - a. I like to distinguish between two types of faith – saving faith, and living faith. Saving faith is required to begin the Christian life; to be born again; to be forgiven of your sins, and experience justification, regeneration, redemption, and adoption – all the things that happen to you instantly when you get saved. To experience salvation you must have saving faith.



- b. **Ephesians 2:8-9** “8 For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift—9 not from works, so that no one can boast.”
  - c. What is saving faith? It involves three elements.
    - i. Knowledge: You must know and understand the gospel. You are a sinner deserving hell, but God loves you and sent His Son, Jesus, to take your punishment, and He rose again. And if you will believe in Jesus, you will be saved.
    - ii. Assent. You must agree that the story of the gospel is true. Jesus really is the divine Son of God, who paid for your sins and rose again, and that He can and will save you.
    - iii. Trust. You have to stop trusting in yourself, and stop living for yourself, and ask Jesus to be your Savior and Boss.
  - d. Saving faith is like a marriage. Marriage begins with knowledge. You have to get to know the other person before you decide to marry them. Second, assent. You have to decide that you like this person and want to marry them. And third, trust. You have to commit your life to them, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, till death do us part. Faith is like that. You must know that you need a Savior, and that Christ died for you. You must assent, or believe that Jesus is real and can save you. And you must trust. You must invite Jesus into Your life to be your Savior and boss, and start walking in obedience to His commands. Faith is required to begin the Christian life.
2. Without faith we cannot live the Christian life.
- a. As I said, I like to distinguish between two kinds of faith – saving faith and living faith. Saving faith is the kind of faith we need to begin the Christian life. But we also need living faith – faith to live a victorious Christian life on a daily basis.
  - b. Hebrews 11:1 is specifically talking about living faith. It is talking about the faith that we need every day as Christians to live the victorious Christian life.
  - c. Why do we need faith for our daily Christian life? I can think of a few reasons.
  - d. The world is constantly trying to pressure us to abandon our Christian convictions and live like them – to live for pleasure,

for possessions, or for the praise of man. 1 John 5:4 says that it is by faith that we conquer the world.

- e. Satan is constantly trying to attack us. He wants to tempt us, to discourage us, and to deceive us, just like he did to Adam and Eve in the garden. Eph 6:16 says the (shield of) faith is the way that we extinguish all of his flaming arrows.
- f. When we run into hard times, the natural thing is to get angry with God, to doubt God, to worry and panic, to get depressed. But Isaiah 26:3 says that if we have faith God will give us perfect peace.
- g. God invites us to cast all our cares upon Him in prayer, through which He will supply all our needs. But Hebrews 11:6 says prayer requires the faith, because you have to believe that God exists, and that He will reward you for seeking Him.
- xi. The Christian life is required to please God.
- xii. **2 Corinthians 5:7** says, “We walk by faith, not by sight.”

### 3. The understanding of faith.

- i. A major byproduct of faith is that it helps us to understand things that can't be understood without faith.
- ii. **Hebrews 11:3** “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.”
- iii. By faith, we understand the origin of the universe.
- iv. Verse 3 tells us that faith helps us understand four things about the universe.
  - 1. The universe is not eternal. If God made it, then it had a beginning.
  - 2. The universe was created by God. It did not make itself. It is not an accident. It is not here by random chance.
  - 3. The universe was created by the word of God. God didn't have to put a lot of time, planning, and effort into creation. He simply spoke and it sprang into being.
  - 4. The universe was created out of nothing. “What is seen was made from things that are not visible.” This is what theologians call creation ex nihilo – creation out of nothing. God didn't create the universe from pre-existing materials. He created it from nothing.
- v. For many years scientists have tried to figure out the origin of the universe. At one time the dominant theory was the nebula theory, which was replaced by the tidal theory, which was replaced by the steady-state theory, which was replaced by the big bang theory. Today there are new theories, but none of them is universally accepted.
- vi. But as Christians we understand the origin of the universe. How do we know? There are no eyewitnesses we can talk to. We can't figure it out by

scientific observation, or by a laboratory experiment, or by a mathematical formula. How can we know? By faith in God's word.

- vii. **Genesis 1:1** "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."
- viii. What's the point? Why does the author of Hebrews bring up this point now?

I think the author might have two points here:

1. First, faith helps us make sense of life. Faith helps us understand life in a way that we couldn't without faith.
  - a. Where did the universe come from? Without faith we might come up with all kinds of crazy theories. But by faith we understand that God made everything.
  - b. Where do people come from? Without faith people imagine that people are here by random chance; they are products of evolution, descended from monkeys. We are just animals with a high intelligence. But by faith we understand that God created people, both male and female, in His image to glorify Him.
  - c. Why is there so much evil and suffering? Without faith we might think the problem is capitalism, or white people, or Jews, or climate change, or Western Civilization and colonialism. But by faith we understand that evil and suffering are the result of sin.
  - d. What is the solution? Without faith we might think the solution is communism, DEI, big government, etc. By faith we understand that the solution is that God sent His Son to die for our sins, and through faith in Him we can be reconciled to God and find strength to overcome sin by loving God and others.
  - e. What happens when we die? Without faith we might imagine that we just cease to exist, and become food for worms. But by faith we understand that believers in Jesus go to heaven, and unbelievers go to hell.
  - f. Faith is like a pair of glasses that help us to see the world and life with clarity.
  - g. **C.S. Lewis** wrote, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."
2. Second, if we can have faith in God's act of creation in the distant past, then we can have faith in God's promises for the future. If we can have faith that God created the universe ex nihilo, then we can have faith that God will supply our needs, answer our prayers, work all things together for our good, give us strength each day to live for

Him, give us joy and peace, never leave or forsake us, and take us home to heaven when we die.