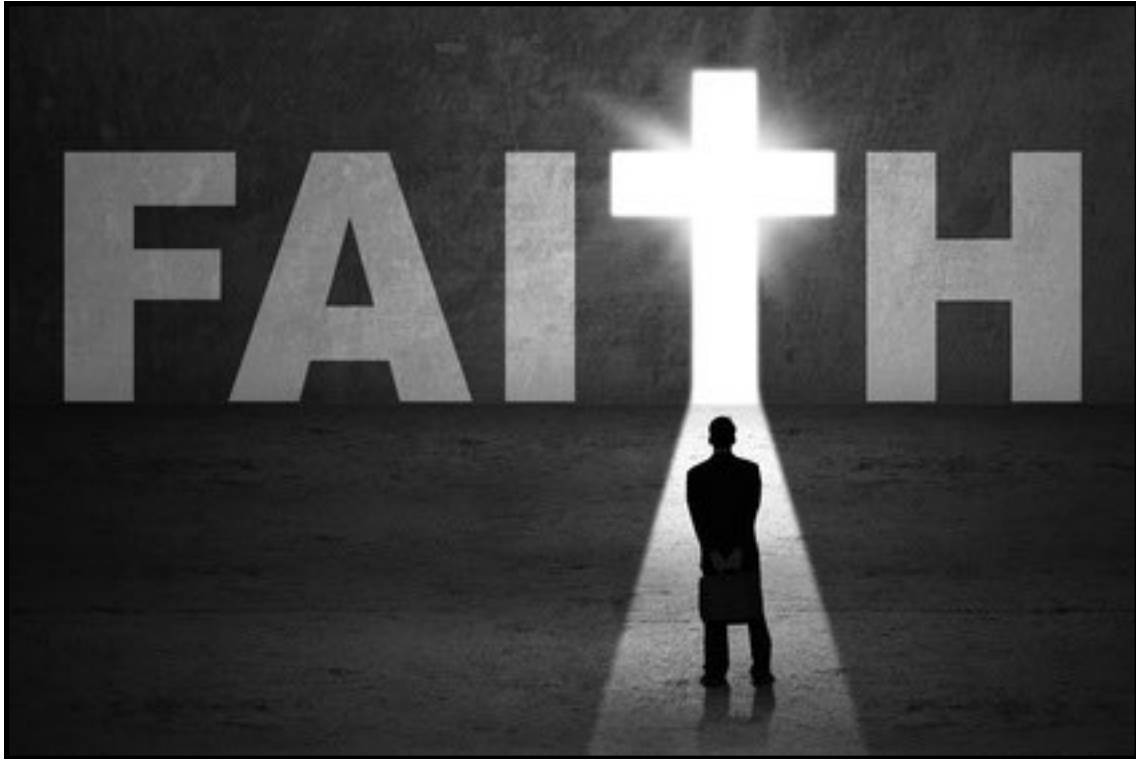


Wednesday with the Word @ Wheat Street

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Faith Matters: An Introduction Hebrews 11:1-40

What is faith?

This is an important question for Christians. It is important because the Bible says:

“It impossible to please God without faith.” Hebrews 11:6

Is faith on us or is it about our faith in God?

Is there a difference between faith and belief?

How do I grow my faith?

How do I know when I have faith?

What activates my faith?

Does my faith move God or does God move my faith?

Is my faith in response to God or does God respond to my faith?

What is the relationship between my faith and God’s acts?

How do I know when I am being faithful?
What is the genesis of faith?
Can people who aren't saved have faith?
How do I know how much faith I have?
What is the measure of faith?
What does faith have to do with the state of my mind? Is faith about the mind?

These are just a few of the questions that I am wrestling with as we enter this time of prayer, fasting and study. I invite you to walk with me as investigate this mysterious thing called faith. In some context faith has been presented as a way to move God or make God act. The emergence of the "prosperity gospel" began to tell us that our faith could result in us demanding things from God and God would have to respond to our faith. If God didn't respond we didn't have enough faith but they never told us how to measure that faith. Was the measurement our faith God's granting or not granting our request? This is to simple an approach for me. I believe faith is very complex and complicated topic that believers need to explore and understand because at the core of Christianity is this thing called faith. We are called to believe / have faith in Jesus Christ.

Romans 10:5-11

Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them." **6** But the righteousness that comes from faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) **7** "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). **8** But what does it say?

"The word is near you,

on your lips and in your heart"

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); **9** because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **10** For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. **11** The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame."

Introduction to Study:

So we start with the famous faith chapter in the Bible as an introduction to this study. A definition or description of faith.

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* testimony.

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

Now faith is substance. Faith is actual, tangible evidence of what we believe as a result of our encounter with God. I say our encounter with God because faith is not simply what we believe but rather faith is form of revelation that is rooted in what God has shown us. Faith is in relationship with God and God's will. As God reveals to us God's will that is to inform our faith. When we have a word from God about what we are hoping for and God confirms via our:

1. Prayers
2. Meditation
3. Solitude
4. Silence
5. Service
6. Guidance / counseling
7. Worship
8. Praise
9. Preached word
10. Fellowship with the saints
11. Signs
12. Dreams
13. Conversation
14. Prophecy
15. Fasting
16. Study / encounter with God's word - central that what we are having faith for has to be inline with the Word of God!

What I am saying is that faith is not simply about what we believe and then God has to respond or God responds. Rather faith is rooted in our relationship with God and the will of God. Our faith is about our believing in God's will as God has revealed that will to us (via the above listed means or some combination thereof and this list is by no means intended to exhaustive).

Faith speaks to something that is and at the same it yet to be. Faith points to what God is going to do that has not manifested in the physical just yet but is real in the spiritual. Faith holds in tension the promise of expectation. Faith is the basis of our hoping against hope. Faith sustains us as we wait for God to do what we are believing God is going to do. While we wait we have to also have faith and find security in a God who does not do what we want God to do. We

have to remember that God is sovereign. By this we mean God is free to do whatever God wants to do. Therefore the object of our faith is in God who is the author and finisher of our faith, who does what God decides to do. A part of faith is accepting the will of God and trusting in God when God acts in accordance with God's will which may not be in line with our prayer request or desire(s).

Hebrews 12:2

2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith,

Our faith is a part of our testimony.

2 For by it the elders obtained a *good* testimony.

The passage is suggesting the elders had faith, lived and walked by faith and as a result they had a good testimony. Faith is about our trusting in God and then being and doing what it is God has calling / called us to be and do. Faith is also about looking in the face of what appears to be a done deal and realizing that God can change the terms of the deal.

Faith Focuses on God and the Nature of God along with the Acts of God

When I say the nature of God I am talking about who God is and the acts of God refer to what God has done and is doing. The acts of God are things we can point to that we know God has done which in turn tells us something about the nature of God. Case in point:

1st John 4:7-10 - The Nature of God: God is Love

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. **8** He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. **9** In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. **10** In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. **11** Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

John 3:16-17 - The Acts of God: Because God is love God gave his son

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. **17** For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Hebrews 11:3

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

The opening reference in this passage is to the acts of creation (Genesis 1:1-2:4a). We accept the fact that God created the heavens and earth because we believe it. We don't need scientific evidence to prove that God is the creator. To understand that the worlds were framed by the word or words of God then signals to us that when God does something God doesn't need tangible materials because the words of God are power enough to create anything. God can speak things into existence. This then ties our faith back to the Word of God and the Words of God. The word of God is found in the Bible and the Words of God are spoken in a multitude of ways by those God has chosen to speak into our lives.

The Highlighted Faith Stories

As the chapter goes onto talk about faith and explain it the author chooses to give us the evidence of faith in the lives of those who lived by faith. It is in these stories that we see what faith looks like and how it manifest itself in the lives of those who believed in God. While the list is dominated by men we know there are an equal number of female stories we could tell as well (and we will). We will honor this list as an introduction to the topic but will attempt to have greater gender equity throughout this study.

Hebrews 11:4 - Abel

4 By faith Abel **offered to God a more excellent sacrifice** than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

Hebrews 11:5-6 - Enoch

5 By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken **he had this testimony, that he pleased God. 6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.**

This sixth verse is significant for us and we will return to it throughout this study. It is impossible to please God without faith. We receive faith when we come to the faith. We are saved by grace and via our faith or believing in God. We don't

decide to get saved or give our lives to Christ. We are moved by the Holy Spirit to give our lives to Christ and follow God. It is not our doing but rather it is God's moving us. As we come to a faith, it is a move of faith, and receive the grace of God, salvation and the gift of faith.

Ephesians 2:7-9

7 so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. **8** For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— **9** not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

Hebrews 11:7 - Noah

7 By faith Noah, being **divinely warned of things not yet seen**, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Hebrews 11:8-10 - Abraham

8 By faith **Abraham obeyed** when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. **9** By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; **10** for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.

Hebrews 11:11-12 - Sarah

11 By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and **she bore a child** when she was past the age, **because she judged Him faithful who had promised**. **12** Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born *as many* as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

Hebrews 11:13-16 - The Faithful Ones and Their Reward

13 These all died in faith, **not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth**. **14** For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. **15** And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. **16** But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

Hebrews 11:17-19 - Abraham and Isaac

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, **offered up Isaac**, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*, **18** of whom it was said, “In Isaac your seed shall be called,” **19** concluding that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

Hebrews 11:20 - Isaac

20 By faith **Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau** concerning things to come.

Hebrews 11:21 - Jacob

21 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, **blessed each of the sons of Joseph**, and worshiped, *leaning* on the top of his staff.

Hebrews 11:22 - Joseph

22 By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and **gave instructions concerning his bones**.

Hebrews 11:23 - Moses’s Parents

23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw *he was* a beautiful child; and **they were not afraid of the king’s command**.

Hebrews 11:24-28 - Moses

24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, **refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter**, **25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin**, **26** esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. **27** By faith he forsook Egypt, **not fearing the wrath of the king**; for **he endured as seeing Him who is invisible**. **28** By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

Hebrews 11:29 - The People of Israel

29 By faith **they passed through the Red Sea** as by dry *land*, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.

Hebrews 11:30 - The Walls of Jericho

30 By faith the walls of **Jericho fell down** after they were encircled for seven days.

Hebrews 11:31 - Rahab

31 By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

Hebrews 11:32-40 - The Summary of the Matter

32 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: **33** who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, **34** quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. **35** Women received their dead raised to life again.

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. **36** Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. **37** They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— **38** of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in dens and caves of the earth*.

39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, **40** God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

These who lived by faith, in this list of examples had not received the promise of Jesus yet they lived and walked by faith. They trusted God to be who God is in the midst of their journey. What we see about faith is that it sustains us in the most difficult of circumstances. This is one of the many reasons it is so important to build up our faith by the power of God's Holy Spirit.

What can we conclude about faith?

Twelve Things About Faith

1. Faith sees what others can't see.
2. Faith enables believers to walk closely with God.
3. Faith enables believers to foresee danger and destruction.
4. Faith enables believers to obey God when they do not know their way.
5. Faith enables believers to receive God's promise in impossible situations.
6. Faith enables believers to persevere even when the promise is not immediately fulfilled.
7. Faith enables believers to sacrifice the promise or sacrifice what they have waited on and after receiving it they are willing to sacrifice it.

8. Faith enables believers to recognize and pass on the blessing of God.
9. Faith enables believers to take risks.
10. Faith enables believers to refuse the pleasures of worldly life.
11. Faith enables believers to overcome fear and other barriers.
12. Faith enables believers to endure many types / kinds of difficulties.