



## SESSION 4

# VICTORIOUS FAITH

### ▶ ***The Point***

My faith in God makes me victorious.

### ▶ ***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 are promoting regularly contradict each other. Even worse, when you question what you read, someone will inevitably offer this jewel: "I know it's hard to believe, but just accept it as true. Take it on faith." Really? Is faith just jumping blindly into belief?

Throughout the Bible, we see a whole different idea of faith. In fact, the author of the Book of Hebrews captured the meaning of faith in a single chapter. In Hebrews 11, we're reminded of individuals who didn't just blindly believe something. They had true faith—even when God called them to believe some pretty incredible things! Let's embrace a different understanding of faith from what the world describes. Hebrews 11 shows us real-life examples of people who faced overwhelming situations and yet lived faithfully through them. They were victorious because of their faith.

### ▶ ***The Setting***

Hebrews 11 has encouraged many believers in times of persecution and suffering. The word "faith" occurs 27 times, while the expression "by faith" occurs 21 times in the chapter. Chapter 10 concluded with exhortations that the righteous "will live by faith" (Heb. 10:38) and believers are "those who have faith and are saved" (v. 39). Figures of the past who by faith pleased God and were approved by God are used to motivate believers and to encourage them to persevere.

# What does the Bible say?

**The ancients** (v. 2)—Literally “our elders”; in Hebrews 11 the Greek term refers to people who lived a long time ago.

## **Hebrews 11:1-6**

**<sup>1</sup> Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.**

**<sup>2</sup> This is what the ancients were commended for.**

**<sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.**

**<sup>4</sup> By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.**

**<sup>5</sup> By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: “He could not be found, because God had taken him away.” For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.**

**<sup>6</sup> And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.**





# STUDY THE BIBLE

## Notes

### Hebrews 11:1-3

<sup>1</sup> Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. <sup>2</sup> This is what the ancients were commended for. <sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

**HEROES OF FAITH**

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1).

- Abel** Offered a more excellent sacrifice
- Enoch** Pleased God and was translated
- Noah** Prepared an ark
- Abraham** Followed God to an unknown country
- Sara** Believed God for a child
- Isaac** Blessed Jacob and Esau
- Jacob** Blessed Joseph's sons and worshiped
- Joseph** Never gave up on returning home
- Moses** Forsook Egypt, choosing suffering over sin
- Rahab** Received God's people

"But without faith it is impossible to please him" (Hebrews 11:6).

**LEADER PACK:** Display Pack Item 4, "Heroes of Faith," to provide some Scriptural context as your group engages the beginning of Hebrews 11.

**OPTIONAL ACTIVITY:** Bring a photo of someone you consider a "hero of faith" to the group gathering. Pass the photo around to your group members while you explain what you admire about him or her. You can also encourage group members to search for people they consider heroes of faith on their smartphones.

**Note:** Activities like these are appealing to visual learners in your group. Incorporating similar activities into your gatherings on a regular basis will help these learners engage more deeply in group discussions.

**READ:** Hebrews 11:1-3 on page 39 of the PSG. Read the text out loud or ask a volunteer to do so.

**GUIDE:** Ask a volunteer to read the first paragraph on page 39 of the PSG (including the bullet list) in order to provide a definition for "faith" and a starting point for discussion.

**GUIDE:** Use the first paragraph on page 53 of this Leader Guide to provide some clarity on what the author of Hebrews intended to communicate in verse 1.

**DISCUSS:** Question #2 on page 39 of the PSG: **"What helps you have faith in God even though you can't see Him?"**

**Note:** Many group members may not have verbalized these concepts in the past. Be encouraging and show appreciation for those who choose to share.

**TRANSITION:** As we move to verse 4, we'll find the first "hero of faith" from Hebrews 11—and it may not be who you expect.

### ALTERNATE QUESTION:

*How can observing creation fuel our faith in the unseen God?*

## Hebrews 11:1-3 Commentary

### **Faith leads us to trust and rely on God.**

**[Verse 1]** The word “is” in **now faith is** has led many Bible students to identify Hebrews 11:1 as a definition of faith. Other Bible students prefer to view the emphasis as being more on what faith *does* rather than what faith *is*. What faith does is give confidence in **what we hope for** and provide assurance about **what we do not see**. That is, faith, at the present time, gives the believer a reality to build his or her life on. This reality is based on what is unseen—those things hoped for but which God has not yet brought about.

Faith provides to the believer the **assurance** or evidence for the existence or reality of things that cannot be demonstrated through sense perception, or which God has promised will occur but have not yet happened. Believers know that faith is founded on objective reality, for faith grabs hold of the immutable promises of the God who cannot and does not lie (see Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Ps. 89:35; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). Because believers are so convinced that the unseen realities grasped by faith are permanent and real, they walk by faith and not by sight (see 2 Cor. 4:18; 5:7).

**[Verse 2]** **The ancients** refers to “our ancestors” mentioned in Hebrews 1:1 and to “these” in 11:39. All the Old Testament heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11:4-38 had one thing in common: a faith God commended. **Were commended for** literally is “witness” or “getting a good report.” God approved of them and witnessed, or testified, to their true faith, as detailed in the Old Testament. As such, they stand as examples worthy of imitation by all believers—with the implication that if we live our lives based on this kind of faith, we too will receive divine commendation. Before we accepted Christ by faith, we could not have a good report. But now, we have become victors by receiving that good report through faith in Christ. **This** refers to the kind of faith explained in verse 1.

**[Verse 3]** Just as faith lays hold of what has not yet happened and convinces the believer of the reality of it (see Heb. 1:7,8,20), so faith accepts the reality of the unseen and otherwise unprovable past. **God’s command** is powerfully creative. All creation came into being by God’s Word (see John 1:1-3).

We accept **by faith** creation out of nothing but God’s spoken Word. Faith gives reality to what we have not seen, whether those things of the future or of the past. Believers’ knowledge (**we understand**) is a matter of spiritual perception gained through faith—a faith based on the written Word of God (Gen. 1:1–2:1). Faith does not stand by itself; it’s not a blind faith. Rather, it’s inseparable from God’s revelation. In fact, this is the faith that responds to revelation.

As believers, **by faith we** stand in a long line of continuity with those who have built their lives on unseen truth and reality. Faith leads us to trust and rely on God. Here we accept by faith creation out of nothing but God’s spoken word. The writer obviously was referring to Genesis 1:1–2:1. God, who created everything by His spoken word, also has redeemed believers through Jesus Christ, God’s ultimate promise fulfilled in the fullness of time (see Gal. 4:4; Heb. 11:39–12:2). True faith acknowledges that God is both Creator and Redeemer.



# STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

## Hebrews 11:4

***4 By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.***

**READ:** Hebrews 11:4 on page 40 of the PSG.

**SUMMARIZE:** Help group members explore the main points from page 40 of the PSG.

1. "After the writer described true faith in verses 1-3, he gave us several examples of people who demonstrated such faith."
2. "The first example comes from the life of Abel, whose full story is recorded in Genesis 4:1-10."
3. "As noted earlier, faith is confidence and trust in God; it's a response to who God is, what He says, and how He has worked. Abel expressed that confidence and trust—that faith—through his worship."

**DISCUSS:** Question #3 on page 40 of the PSG: **"What's the relationship between faith and genuine worship?"**

**DO:** Direct group members to complete the activity "Heroes of Faith" on page 41 of the PSG. If time permits, encourage volunteers to list some of the common characteristics shared among their heroes.



*Hebrews 11 lists several heroes of faith from the Old Testament. Use the space below to identify people you've admired for their faith both now and in the past.*

*In addition to a strong faith, what are some characteristics or habits these people have in common?*

**TRANSITION:** As we conclude with verses 5-6, we'll find another lesser-known biblical hero who demonstrated incredible faith.

**ALTERNATE QUESTION:**

***When has faith fueled your worship or sacrificial giving?***



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## Hebrews 11:4 Commentary

### **Faith responds in worship to God.**

**[Verse 4]** Genesis 4:3-5 details how Cain and Abel brought offerings to the Lord. That Abel's offering was a **better offering** probably does not refer to what was presented, nor to the amount presented, but to the worshiper's heart attitude. That is, it wasn't the gift, but the giver that made the difference. Three times in this verse it's stated that Abel acted **by faith**. In verse 6, the writer made it clear that "without faith it is impossible to please God."

By his faith, Abel **was commended as righteous**. This verse brings together righteousness and faith. One cannot have the former without the latter—a truth emphasized in Habakkuk 2:4 (an Old Testament text the writer of Hebrews quoted in 10:38). Jesus Himself called Abel a righteous person (see Matt. 23:35) and the apostle John also identified him as righteous (see 1 John 3:12). But be clear on this: Abel was not righteous in his own self. Rather, he was righteous because God declared him righteous because Abel had faith in God and obeyed Him.

Being a righteous man, being approved by God, and offering God a better sacrifice did not prevent Abel from being a victim of violence—in fact, it led to his murder. That "my righteous one will live by faith" (Heb. 10:38) does not guarantee one will live! Jesus is the preeminent example of this as the supremely Righteous One who was put to death by the unrighteous (see Acts 3:14-15). But that Abel was murdered by his brother does not change the fact that God **commended [Abel] as righteous** and God **spoke well of his offerings**.

**By faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.** Indeed, it's Abel's example that still speaks. His example shows us what it means to trust God and live with righteous integrity even in the face of hatred, violence, and death.

Dead people are not silent. They do tell tales. Abel still witnesses to us: he calls us to emulate him and persevere. That Abel still speaks also reminds us that, while Abel is dead to life on earth, he is alive through God. Abel is the first example of those who focused their lives on the better country (see Heb. 11:16). Abel's faith didn't end in disappointment. While Abel's life was cut short, how he expressed his faith in God in his life still teaches the whole world what faith is and does.

Abel's life of faith teaches us—right at the start of the list—that faith leads one to worship God. Abel's faith led him to bring a sacrifice that God approved. It pleased God. Abel's faith led him to be truly righteous, and Abel's faith offers us a true witness or testimony to the life that pleases God. Abel not only shows us that true faith leads us to worship God, but also that there's a right way to worship the Lord that involves a proper heart attitude. Cain's actions show us what happens when one approaches God in the wrong way, and the tragic consequences that this can have in one's life and the lives of those around that person.



# STUDY THE BIBLE

## Notes

### Hebrews 11:5-6

***<sup>5</sup> By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: "He could not be found, because God had taken him away." For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. <sup>6</sup> And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.***

**READ:** Hebrews 11:5-6 on page 42 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Encourage group members to read through the first three paragraphs on page 42 of the PSG in order to gain some background information on Enoch.

**DISCUSS:** Question #4 on page 42 of the PSG: **"What characteristics describe a person who walks with God?"**

**Note:** Group members can engage this question by exploring biblical characters who walked with God, or by highlighting characteristics that define godly people in today's world.

**RECAP:** Read aloud the first paragraph on page 43 of the PSG:

Like any good teacher, the writer of Hebrews stopped to emphasize his point: "Without faith it is impossible to please God." 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 earnestly 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.

**ALTERNATE QUESTION:**  
*Why is faith necessary for pleasing God?*

**DISCUSS:** Question #5 on page 43 of the PSG: **"What kinds of 'rewards' do we experience when we exercise faith?"**

**GUIDE:** Refer back to "The Point" from this session: **"My faith in God makes me victorious."** As time permits, encourage volunteers to share any final thoughts and questions.



## Hebrews 11:5-6

### **Faith responds with obedience that is pleasing to God.**

**[Verse 5]** The account of Enoch's life is found in Genesis 5 (see vv. 18-24), a chapter in which verse after verse ends with "then he died." Except Enoch! Of him it says that after his 365 years, "Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away" (v. 24). Enoch did not experience death; he was directly translated, or **was taken from this life**, to heaven into the presence of God. That Enoch **could not be found**, a reference to Genesis 5:24, means people searched for him.

But it was not only at the end of his 365 years that Enoch pleased God. No, **before he was taken, he was commended**. Enoch pleased God by his faith. Genesis 5 does not mention Enoch's faith, but it does state two times that he "walked faithfully with God" (Gen. 5:22,24), implying his intimacy with God and his steadfast commitment to Him.

**[Verse 6]** From Enoch's example, the writer of Hebrews drew a general principle and universal biblical truth: **without faith it is impossible to please God**. To please God we must be persons of faith. Both Abel (see Heb.11:4) and Enoch (see v. 5) were approved by God because of their lives of faith. If we are to please God and be approved by Him, we must be characterized by this kind of faith.

Notice that here in verse 6 the writer offered both the negative and positive sides to his declaration. Negatively, **without faith** pleasing God is impossible. Positively, one **must believe**. Belief is necessary, but not just belief in and of itself or mere wishful thinking. Faith must have an object—it's the object of faith that is important. Such belief includes the firm conviction that God **exists** and that he **rewards those who earnestly seek him**.

True faith has both a present and a future orientation: God **exists** and He **rewards**. Those who have true faith affirm God is personal and active on behalf of the faithful in the present, and they live in confidence that He will reward them in the future. True faith affirms the existence of the God who has spoken and acted throughout history (see 1:1-2). This is the invisible God. True faith believes in the existence of what cannot be seen.

True faith also believes this unseen God rewards those who seek Him. To **seek** God describes those who rely on and trust God and His promises. The term emphasizes the singular determination to devote oneself to God and His service. The **rewards** are not earthly and material, but heavenly and eternal (see 10:34-36). God is both the Rewarder and the reward itself.

**Anyone who comes to him**, which is parallel to "those who earnestly seek him," is used in Hebrews to refer to believers who have a direct approach to God and an on-going relationship with Him (see 4:16; 7:25; 10:22; 12:22). The expression was used of worship, but was not limited only to those times of worship. It's comprehensive, referring to a God-centered lifestyle, like that which Enoch had with God. For anyone to draw near to God, faith (belief) is the key. And this faith—the faith that responds with obedience—is pleasing to God.



5 minutes

# LIVE IT OUT

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to page 44 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider these options for expressing their faith in Christ this week:



## Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **Trust.** Take a moment each day to verbally express your trust in God through prayer. Tell God that you will trust Him throughout the day, and tell Him why you will trust Him.
- ▶ **Read.** Read the Old Testament stories of the men and women mentioned in Hebrews 11. Read about their lives and find out how they expressed confident trust and faith in God. Consider recording what you learn from each person.
- ▶ **Encourage.** Even as God uses the lives in Hebrews 11 to encourage us, choose to be an encouragement to someone else. Encourage their faith and trust in Christ by telling them how you trusted Christ in a similar experience.

## Wrap It Up

**TRANSITION:** Read or restate the Conclusion from page 44 of the PSG:

Don't let anyone tell you to jump blindly into any kind of belief. That's not faith. Choose to trust God because of all that He has done for you and for the world around you. That's the informed trust that leads to victorious faith.

**PRAY:** Conclude by praising God for His faithfulness. Express your desire to rely on Him in faith, and express thanksgiving that we *can* rely on God for victory in all areas of life.



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