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VICTORIOUS FAITH



*What are some things you can't see
but you know are there?*

QUESTION #1

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My faith in God makes me victorious.



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.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Hebrews 11:1-3

¹ Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ² This is what the ancients were commended for. ³ 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.

Let's start by being real clear on what faith is. Verse 1 describes how faith works and what it does:

- ▶ **Faith is an inward conviction.** Faith means trusting God and believing (even knowing) that He will do what He says He will do—because He always does.
- ▶ **Faith gives us confidence.** Faith has substance. It's an assurance based on the reality of what God has already done and said.

Want an example? We know the universe exists; it's here for us to touch, see, and explore. Yet for all we've learned and keep learning about creation, science alone simply can't answer the most fundamental questions about its existence—especially the question "Why?" Is the universe merely a giant cosmic accident? Or is there some purpose or plan?

Christians know the answer to the "why" question because of our faith: "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command." God created everything we see in order to provide a place where we could enjoy a relationship with Him. We can only understand this dimension of our reality by hearing God's Word and believing what He said.

Our universe isn't some accident of physics; it's the intentional work of God who reveals Himself first as Creator. God started with nothing and brought all that exists into being from nothing. Therefore, we can be confident and have faith that God will continue to work His will in our world—and in our lives.

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

QUESTION #2

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.

After the writer described true faith in verses 1-3, he gave us several examples of people who demonstrated such 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 Him. We can do the same.

The first example comes from the life of Abel, whose full story is recorded in Genesis 4:1-10. The tragedy of Cain and Abel is a familiar story within our culture, although it does raise a number of questions that often go unanswered. For example: why did God reject Cain's offering but accept Abel's?

We aren't told much in the Scriptures about the difference between the two offerings, but the text does offer some hints. For example, Abel was careful to choose the best of his flock to offer to God (see Gen. 4:4). On the other hand, Cain seems to have been careless in what he chose for his offering (see 4:3). In other words, 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'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. 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?

What's the relationship between faith and genuine worship?

QUESTION #3

HEROES OF FAITH

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.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

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

"Faith enables the believing soul to treat the future as present and the invisible as seen."

—J. OSWALD SANDERS

Hebrews 11:5-6

⁵ 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. ⁶ 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.

The author 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 us to meet another man of faith named Noah (see Gen. 6:1–9:29 and Heb. 11:7). As we read through this genealogy, we get the impression that life seemed to go on fairly normally after the time of Cain and Abel: people were born, got married, had children, and died.

Then there was Enoch (see Gen. 5:21-24). When Enoch was 365 years old, “he was no more” (v. 24). Why? Because “God took him away.” Enoch 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 author of Hebrews noted that Enoch’s faith—his confidence in God’s future—was the key to this new reality.

What characteristics describe a person who walks with God?

QUESTION #4



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.

And what reward do we seek? Riches? Fame? No. 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’s what Paul sought: “What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8).

Faith opens our understanding to find a different reality in the presence of God. We find everything that’s truly important in His presence: peace, love, joy, hope, and more. 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.

- ▶ A faith that pleases God makes us victorious.
- ▶ A faith that is confident God exists makes us victorious.
- ▶ A faith that knows God will reward our pursuit of Him makes us victorious.

Take time this week to read the rest of Hebrews 11. You’ll find others who lived with confidence in God’s existence, presence, and reward. Life wasn’t easy for any of them—in fact, it was very hard for most of them—but they confidently endured because they knew their faith in God would give them victory.

Whatever difficulty you are facing, you can be victorious in Christ. The men and women in Hebrews 11 walked down the road of difficulty, too. Whatever challenges confront you, take courage from the way these people responded in faith. Others have stood confidently in Christ—and so can you.

What kinds of “rewards” do we experience when we exercise faith?

QUESTION #5

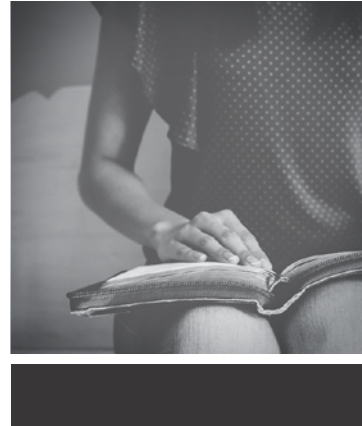
LIVE IT OUT

How will you express your faith in God this week? Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ **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.

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.

My thoughts



Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLvictory**