



FAITH

Hebrews 11
selection (NIV)

We're going to be looking at the Trinity, at our God. Before we do that we consider what it means to have faith in Him, what *Faith* really means.

A lot of people would say that if you really believe something, if you don't doubt at all that you will get it, then that is faith. That is even what some Christian speakers seem to teach, but is that really faith in the Biblical sense?

Hebrews 11:1 would seem to add weight to this view: *Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.* (NIV). But a deeper look will see that it means something entirely different. The rest of the chapter goes on to tell us what the faith being spoken of here is really about.

The thing we hope for that we are to be sure of is the *promise God gives us*, likewise we are to be certain of *Him who we cannot see*. There is nothing here about working up belief that something we have prayed for will happen. No, it is believing that *something He has said* is reliable and true.

As you read through the chapter (or the selection of it printed here) you will see that this requires us among other things to:

- adopt a worldview consistent with what God has said, rather than what man has said (eg v3, v7, v11, v25, v36)
- act in accordance with what God says whatever the cost to ourselves (eg v7, v8, v17, v25, v36)
- be patient and wait (eg v11, v13, v30, v39)
- remember that we are serving God and His plan, not the other way round (eg v8, v13, v19, v26, v40)
- remind ourselves of God's word to keep us going through the hard times (eg v15, v17, v18, v36, v37)

So it all starts with knowing God.

If you know someone is dependable you will trust them, if you are not sure of their character you will be hesitant to rely on them.

There are two people in a queue at a village store. The first one has a couple of bags full of goods and says "Is it all right if I pay you later?" and the shopkeeper says "No problem". The next one has only a can of drink and a bar of chocolate and asks the same. The shopkeeper says "No, pay now or you can't have those goods!" Why? The first

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.

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.

7 By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. ...

8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

11 By faith Abraham, even though he was past age— and Sarah herself was barren— was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.

13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.

14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.

15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.

17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son,

18 even though God had said to him, It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.

19 Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.



one is well known to the shopkeeper. They live in the same village, drink at the same pub and have common friends. The second one isn't known. The shopkeeper has faith in the first but not the second.

How well do you know God? Do you have faith in Him? Some people say "I know that God can do anything, but I am not sure He will do things for me". That is not full faith. We need to get to the point of being able to say truly "I am in God's hands. I trust Him to always do the best for me and to be leading me in His plan". If we can couple that with knowing His word we will be in a strong place of trust and faith.

The modern person wants instant access to information. They go for a walk in the mountains with a GPS, Google map app and a hotline to the airsea rescue squadron. That is not a picture of biblical faith, it is closer to 'walking in fear of disaster'.

Instead, to take just a compass and map and to set off knowing you are heading in the right direction. If the mist comes down you pause, recheck your compass and walk on. When the mist clears for a few moments you get a confirming sight that you are going the right way, then the mist comes back and you walk on *in faith* because you have had the confirming 'word' that you are still on the right path.

When we first become Christians often everything is clear. We see the path rising before us, the Son is shining, it all seems new, fresh and obvious. But as we go higher up the path now we do get into places where there is mist. We need to recheck the compass and map (what has God said? what is Jesus doing?) and walk on in faith. From time to time there will be confirming words that all is well, and then we are back in the mist. God sometimes seems far off... that does not mean He has left us, it means He wants us to carry on as we were. That is what walking in faith means.

He does not want us to stop and wait for guidance, for He promises us He will guide us (Psalm 48:14, Isaiah 42:16, Isaiah 58:11). Faith is to keep on going, knowing God is with you even when it seems He is far away.

Finally, note that Hebrews 11 starts with knowing that God's word is true (v3). No, that it is True. Starting from Creation, His word is Truth. We believe what it says, and we stand on it. If you allow doubt to creep in about any part of His word, you will find that you do not have a Rock beneath you but at best a wobbly raft. Faith begins with a decision: I will believe what God says.

But, back to the shopkeeper; you will only believe Him as you come to know Him. The more you know Him, the more you will believe. Unlike the shopkeeper, however, God looks for us to trust Him first; He reveals more of Himself as we trust Him. So, trust Him beyond the evidence you have and He will then strengthen your understanding to enable you then to trust Him even more... and so on!

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selection (NIV)

24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

25 He chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.

26 He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days.

36 Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison.

37 They were stoned; they were sawn in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and ill-treated—

39 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.

40 God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.