

Faith: Learning to Trust

Do you desire to please God? If you are a Christian, the answer should be “yes!” But sometimes faith doesn’t come easy, does it? Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith it is impossible to please God. Faith is the essential ingredient in bringing pleasure to God.

What is faith? How would you define faith? Write out your definition in the space below.

There are two definitions that I like. One is technical, the other, practical.

DEFINITION NUMBER ONE

The technical definition says that faith is *active trust in God*. As you can see, there are three aspects to this definition.

Faith is active - it is not passive. It is something that goes on moment by moment.

Faith is trust - trust is a synonym for faith. It means to rely upon, to lean on and to have confidence in. (See Proverbs 3:5; Psalm 56:3.) Other synonyms for faith are "believe" (Acts 16:31; John 6:29); and "receive" (John 1:12).

Faith has an object - it is God and His Word. Biblical faith is never faith in faith, but faith in the God of the Bible.

DEFINITION NUMBER TWO

The practical definition comes from author and speaker Ney Bailey. Ney says that faith is *taking God at His Word*. Whenever “faith” is spoken of in the Bible, you can simply insert the phrase, “*taking God at His Word*.”

Try that with the following passages. Read the verse, substituting the words *taking God at His Word* every time the word faith is used.

Hebrews 11:1

Hebrews 11:6

2 Corinthians 5:7

Romans 10:17

I. Developing Faith in the Midst of the Storm – Mark 4:35-41

In the Gospels, Jesus Christ was primarily interested in developing the disciples' faith. The only times He ever rebuked them were for their lack of faith (see Matthew 6:30). Let's look at one of those instances where He developed their faith.

Read Mark 4:35-41. It's the familiar story of the stilling of the storm.

³⁵ That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." ³⁶ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. ³⁷ A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. ³⁸ Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" ³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. ⁴⁰ He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" ⁴¹ They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (NIV)

Let's do some inductive study of this passage. We'll begin with the people in the story.

Who were the people involved in this experience?

What did Jesus say? What did the disciples say?

Where were they going?

What were the disciples' reactions to the storm?

What were Jesus' reactions to the storm?

What was the disciples' reaction to the miracle?

According to verse 40, what was Jesus most interested in?

Though the question in verse 41 went unanswered, what conclusion did the disciples eventually come to? Why was that so important?

In Mark 4:1-34, the disciples had just heard a series of lectures on faith by the greatest teacher the world had ever known. And yet, Jesus wanted to see if they could put it into action. And so He set them on a course for the other side of the Sea of Galilee. But their journey was interrupted by the severe storm.

How did the disciples respond to this test of faith? Did they “pass”?

Why not?

Writing of trials and challenges to faith, Os Guinness says:

The truth is this: We can always have sure and sufficient reasons for knowing why we can trust God, but we cannot always know what God is doing, and why . . . As believers, we cannot always know why, but we can always know why we trust God who knows why, and that makes all the difference. (In Two Minds, p. 254, 255.)

In the midst of trials and challenges to our faith, we need to remember what the disciples learned: *The boat will not sink and the storm will not last forever. Either He will calm the storm - or He will calm his child.*

Take a moment and read that statement again. How does it relate to the trials you are going through right now?

II. Defining Faith in the Midst of Life-Experiences – Hebrews 11:1-6

Finally, turn once again to the passage in Hebrews 11 and read verses 1-6.

¹ Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of 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. ⁴ By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead. 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. (NIV)

This is the section where “faith” is most clearly defined in the Scriptures. The entire chapter tells of common men who possessed uncommon faith. Ask yourself the following questions:

- a. What is faith really like?

- b. How does faith make a difference?

- c. How can faith grow?

Conclusion

Hebrews 11 goes on to talk about the great men and women of faith in the Old Testament. Their lives and stories are meant to be an inspiration to us. But there are men and women today who lead lives of inspiring faith. Perhaps you know someone or several people whose faith serves to inspire you to trust God more.

Who are those people? List them - and try to describe what it is about their faith that is an encouragement to you.

For many, faith comes hard. If you are one of those who struggles with trusting God moment by moment, why not pick up one of these books. They are sure to help!

Suggested Reading

Faith Is Not A Feeling, Ney Bailey (Here's Life Publishers)

Faith, A 31 Day Experiment, Dick Purnell (Thomas Nelson Publishers)

In Two Minds, Os Guinness (InterVarsity Press)