

The Life of Faith

Advance in Faith 1 – Unit 5

Week 1 Essential Faith



Introduction

The purpose of this session is:

- *To highlight the essential role that faith plays in the life of a believer*
- *To define what faith is and what faith is not*
- *To encourage believers to embrace faith as the key to life for a Christ-follower*

1. Faith: essential to Life:

In the context of the Christian life, faith is an essential element without which meaningful engagement with God would be impossible. A simple face-value reading of New Testament scriptures will quickly highlight the central role that faith plays in our experience of and relationship with God.

Hebrews 11:6

“And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who comes to him must believe that God exists and that He rewards those who sincerely seek him”.

1 John 5:4

“Every child of God defeats this evil world and we achieve this victory through our faith”.

Ephesians 3:12

“Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God’s presence”.

Romans 5:1-2

“Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God’s glory”.

2 Corinthians 5:6-7 (NIV)

“Therefore, we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord and we walk by faith, not by sight”.

Galatians 3:26

“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus”.

Romans 1:16-17 (NIV)

“For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile. This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.”

“The just will live by faith” – (Hab. 2:4)

- See also Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38

This statement has 2 implications:

1. The just will **receive** life by faith (Gal.3:11)
2. The just will **live** life by faith (Heb. 10:38)

For the follower of Christ, faith is both the **doorway** and the **pathway**. It is the means by which we enter into right relationship with God and it is the only means by which we continue in right relationship with God.

The word ‘life’ is as important as the word ‘faith’ in this equation because the purpose of faith is life – a certain kind of life. The bible calls it abundant life (John 10:10) and eternal life (John 17:3), the kind and quality of life that God has designed and always desires for us to experience. The reason God calls us to faith is because He wants us to enjoy a certain kind of life, the kind only possible when we express faith in him as our Lord and Saviour.

Faith is the ‘means’ but life is the ‘end’.

2. Defining Faith

Dictionary Definition: *“Human belief in and reliance upon the divine”.*

The primary Old Testament words for “believe,” “belief,” and “faith” are Heb. *ḥāman* and its cognates *ḥēmûnâ* and *ḥēmet*. The basic meaning of *ḥāman* is “be steady, firm and trustworthy,” “to believe,”; the verb signifies “accept as true” (1 Kgs. 10:7 par. 2 Chr. 9:6; Lam. 4:12; Hab. 1:5), “be sure” (Job 15:22), or “trust” (Jer. 12:6). The meaning of *ḥēmûnâ* is “steadiness,” “faithfulness,” or “candor”, while that of *ḥēmet* is “trustworthiness,” “faithfulness” (Gen. 32:10), or “truth” (e.g. Gen. 42:16).

The New Testament terms are Gk. *pisteuō* “believe” and *pístis* “faith.” John uses the verb *pisteuō* to indicate the circumstance of believing; Paul primarily chooses the noun *pístis*, but cf. Rom. 3:22, where he combines the noun and verb to indicate “faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.”

Basically, however, both the Old and the New Testament view faith as mankind’s trust in God.¹

Perhaps the most useful synonym for ‘faith’ is trust. When you break it down to its irreducible minimum the life of faith can be understood as a life of trust in God.

This ‘trust’ is based solely on a confidence in the unchanging character of God, an understanding that forms as a result of 3 things:

1. Revelation - God’s self-disclosure. The person, presence, purpose and power of God made known to us through the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit (see Ephesians 1+2).

Ephesians 2:8-10

“For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe”.

2. Relationship - Our personal, first-hand, experiential knowledge of God. The faithfulness, reliability, wisdom and grace of God at work in our lives results in a growing confidence in his unchanging character.

Psalm 9:7-10

“The LORD reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. He will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice. The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you”.

3. Reason - It stands to reason that a God who is inherently perfect in all his ways can be trusted. The simple rule of logic would lead us to accept that if God is always good (and he is) and God is always right

¹ Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, 373-74 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987).

(and he is) then God can always be trusted. That said, while it is 'reasonable' to trust such a God faith does not always appear 'rational' (e.g. how rational was it for Noah to build the ark, Gideon to reduce his army from 30000 to 300 or Joshua to march around the city of Jericho?).

We can say, therefore, that faith is a reasoning, relational trust in the unchanging character of God who is both good and right in all that He does.

3. What faith is not

1. Faith is not an immunisation against the realities of human experience.

A life of faith is not a guarantee that we will have a pain-free, comfortable existence for the rest of our days. It's important that we understand that otherwise we will set ourselves up for disappointment and frustration. If you are a human being then you will suffer setbacks, you will experience the pain of disappointment, you will get sick, you will suffer loss, you will grieve at some point and you'll get old – that is just the reality of human experience for all of us.

As long as we are bound by these mortal, fragile, human bodies we will be susceptible to suffering, sickness, disease, pain, hurt and adversity of every kind imaginable. The difference however, for those who live by faith, is that there is an ever-present, supernatural reservoir of grace, strength, wisdom and power. We don't walk alone.

John 16:33

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

1 John 5:3-5

"This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith".

2. Faith is not a 'mechanism' with which we leverage God.

Faith is not a button we push or a lever we pull to get things from God. Faith is not a force or magical power that we use to get our way in life. Faith isn't a 'cheque' that you cash with God. Faith is inherently relational not mechanical.

3. Faith is not the absence of fear and doubt.

Faith is more often than not a willingness to trust in the presence of fear and doubt rather than the complete absence of them. The reality of our human experience and the reality of human emotion is that we often feel fear and doubt when confronted with situations or circumstances that are threatening our wellbeing and seem beyond our control. Faith is choosing to trust in the sovereignty and goodness of God in the face of those circumstances.

Conclusion:

In summary then we can say that faith is a reasoning, relational trust in the unchanging character of God that is essential to both receiving eternal life and living an abundant life.

Group Discussion:

1. Have you ever struggled to trust God with a situation or circumstance in your life? Did you find yourself questioning God's wisdom, concern, ability or love as a result? How does one trust God when what He is doing (or not doing) doesn't make sense?
2. How do you think we can go about deepening and strengthening our confidence in God's character and consequently our ability to trust him?
3. Apart from salvation, what else do you think we can trust God for?

Memory verse:

Romans 1:17 (NIV)

“For in the gospel righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’.