

The Life of Faith

Advance in Faith – Level 1 – Unit 5
February 4th to March 18th

Week 2
The Object of our Faith



Introduction

The purpose of this session is:

- *To identify God as the object and focal point of our faith*
- *To explore the essential nature of God’s character and establish what makes God worthy of our complete trust*
- *To encourage believers to pursue the knowledge of God as the primary catalyst for building faith*

1. Faith in...?

Mark 11:22 – “And Jesus answered them and said, ‘Have faith in God’”.

Note that Jesus did not just say, “Have faith”. He qualified His statement by saying, “Have faith in God.” The purpose of our study is not to build growing confidence in “faith” but in the God toward whom our faith is directed.

Faith always has a subject and an object. Someone always directs faith toward someone or something else. We are the subjects (those who have faith in their hearts) and in the case of Christian faith, God is the object – the focal point of our faith.

It is important to understand this because, even though the subject of our study is ‘faith’, we are ultimately trying to point people to God. It isn’t the power of faith that changes a situation or heals a body or brings deliverance – it’s the power of God – His Spirit, His hand, His presence, His person.

Faith always has a focal point and for the believer that focal point is Jesus.

Hebrews 12:1-2

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith”.

2. Faith and Knowing God

Knowing God and the trustworthiness of his character is essential to having faith in him. Incorrect or incomplete assumptions about who God is and how God works will undermine one’s ability to trust Him.

“For some reason or other believers get into their heads such a wrong idea of God that it comes between them and God or between them and their trusting God. Since they do not recognise what they are doing, they blame God rather than their faulty picture, little realising that God is not like that at all. Unable to see God as he is, they cannot trust him as they should, and doubt is the result.”¹

¹ O. Guinness, *God in the Dark: The Assurance of Faith Beyond a Shadow of Doubt* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1996), pp. 58-59.

There are four primary sources to draw from when pursuing the knowledge of God. These are:

- (a) Revelation
- (b) Tradition
- (c) Reason
- (d) Experience

(a) Revelation - this would include both the “general” revelation of God’s existence and nature through Creation (Romans 1:20-21) as well as the “specific” written forms of divine revelation i.e. the writings of the Hebrew Old Testament and the writings of the early Christian apostles in the New Testament.

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”.

(b) Tradition - the beliefs held in common by the early church and the Reformers of the sixteenth century as expressed in the ecumenical creeds and faith confessions. These are conclusions reached as a result of many years of rigorous study and debate and held in common by the many. For example, The Apostles Creed:

*I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen*

(c) Reason - the simple rule of logic, especially the rule of non-contradiction that forbids the equal affirmation of opposite propositions. E.g. God cannot be both “perfect” and “wrong”. If His one, He cannot be the other.

It stands to reason that 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 (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?).

(d) Experience - human experience in general and especially the religious experience of God’s people in the community of faith. While personal, private experience of the individual is considered we generally mean the shared experience of many i.e. experiences held by the majority.

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. God’s essential character

Theologians often speak of God as being essentially two things:

1. God is Great (*Transcendent*)

This refers to who God is and what he does apart from us i.e. who he is in and of himself. E.g. God is “Sovereign”

2. God is Good (*Immanent*)

This refers to who God is and what he does in relation to us i.e. how we experience him in the context of our relationship with him. E.g. God is “Love”.

Perhaps the one statement in scripture closest to describing the essential character of God is “God is love” (**1 John 4:8**). However, it is important that we consider this attribute in the light of all of God’s other revealed attributes.

Other manifestations of God’s “goodness” include:

(a) God is Holy

God’s holiness includes but extends beyond the notion of purity. He is flawless, incorruptible and undefiled. However to say that God is holy is to say that he is “different” to the point of being incomparable. There is none like him.

- **1 Peter 1:14-16**

“As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

(b) God is Merciful

God’s mercy is revealed in his patience and kindness particularly to those who are underserving.

- **Deuteronomy 4:31**

“For the Lord your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon you or destroy you or forget the solemn covenant he made with your ancestors”.

- **Psalm 103:8**

“The Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love”.

(c) God is Faithful

God is faithful in that he is consistent, truthful and reliable.

- **Deuteronomy 7:9**

“Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments”.

- **1 John 1:9**

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”.

(d) God is Compassionate

God’s compassion is his emotive and active response to our vulnerability and suffering.

- **Psalm 145:9**

“The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made”.

- **2 Corinthians 1:3**

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort”.

(e) God is Just

God’s justice refers to his even-handedness in dealing with us – he is fair and equitable and treats all human beings as equally. God’s justice also means that he carries a particular concern for the oppressed, afflicted, marginalised and unfairly treated in the world.

- **Romans 2:11**

“God shows no favoritism”.

- **Psalm 140:12**

“I know that the Lord secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy”.

(f) God is Eternal

By Eternal we mean both that God is without beginning and without end (everlasting) and that He possesses a quality of existence (eternal life) that is gifted to us through faith in Christ.

- **Genesis 21:33**

“Then Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he worshiped the Lord, the Eternal God”.

- **Romans 16:26**

“But now as the prophets foretold and as the eternal God has commanded, this message is made known to all Gentiles everywhere, so that they too might believe and obey him”.

Conclusion:

In summary we can say that faith, as a reasoning, relational trust in and submission to God, is grounded in the unchanging nature of God’s character, that character being intrinsically both good and right.

It is therefore, knowing God in an ever-deepening manner that serves as the catalyst for building strong faith. A people of faith are a people with a deeply held confidence in both the unchanging goodness and greatness of God.

Group Discussion:

1. What is your picture of God? How do you “see” him or think about him? What words would you use to describe him? What images come to mind when you imagine Him?
2. What influences / life experiences have shaped your understanding of who God is and how God works?
3. How does your current perception of God compare with his “self-disclosure” in scripture and in the person of Jesus? Do you think that you might have some thoughts about God that could be inaccurate? If so, what are they? Share them with the group and see what the rest say / think.
4. What practical steps can you take to get to know God better?

Memory verse:

Deuteronomy 32:4

*“He is the Rock, His works are perfect, and all His ways are just.
A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He”.*