



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

Will He find
faith?

Faith made
visible

Faith:
Trained and
Tested

Faith at work

MIDWEEK SCRIPT

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August

Session 1 – Will He find faith?

Welcome to the small group series for August. This month our service theme is centered on “Practicing our faith.” Our small group discussions will look at the 10th – 13th chapters of Hebrews and what they tell us about faith.

First, let’s look at what kind of faith our Lord will expect upon His return. The author of Hebrews introduces chapter 10, verses 37-39 by saying that this is the promise that is made to those who have done the will of God:

For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith. But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in Him. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

Our faith is based on the promise of Christ’s return, and if we truly believe in and await His return, then our faith must be lived out in such a way that it demonstrates our confidence in this knowledge.

One expression of faith is perseverance. The author reminds the Hebrews of the perseverance they had after they first turned to Christ: they endured great struggles, they had compassion for the author when he was imprisoned, they joyfully accepted the plundering of their goods – all because they were confident that their actions were storing away treasures in heaven (Hebrews 10:32-34). Chief Apostle Leber, when he was ordained in 2005, spoke of “not drawing back,” and instead enduring in our faith until the end because it could be the turning point of gaining all or losing all.

The passage from Hebrews relates to the perseverance seen in Jesus’ parable of the persistent widow, recorded in Luke 18:1-8. In this parable, Jesus talks about a widow who is being pressured by her adversary. She goes to the judge in the city and says, *Get justice for me from my adversary* (Luke 18:3). And she does not leave this judge alone until he finally helps her. Jesus emphasizes the widow as an example of firm faith because even the unjust judge was convinced to help the widow. As the truly just One, how much more is our God ready and able to help us?

There are all sorts of adversaries in our lives - not necessarily just people, but also spiritual currents that pull us away from God. The devil is our greatest adversary who seeks to undermine our faith. He wants unbelief to enter our hearts and for us to be discouraged by the unbelief we see in others. But we must remember to persevere!

When we encounter adversaries, either within ourselves or around us – unbelief, godlessness, lovelessness – how do we react? Do we just accept these things as they are with the thought, “Well, that’s just the way it is?” When our adversaries pester us, when we feel that our faith is becoming weak, then there is only one thing to do – turn to the Lord! That is where our faith will be strengthened and our spirits renewed. When we see unbelief or godlessness around us, the confidence we have in God and His promises helps us fight and overcome these feelings or influences. We can choose to live our lives, not as we see fit, but aligned to God’s will. We choose to love God and others. Even when we may not see much love around us, we persevere.

The parable ends with Jesus’ question – *when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?* (Luke 18:8) Each one of us is addressed here. The Lord is asking whether He will truly find **that kind of** faith on the earth – not the kind of faith that gives up in hardship, but rather perseveres until the end, like the widow’s faith. Even if nothing seems to happen, and our prayers do not seem to be having any effect. Even when the Lord seems not to be listening. What do we do in such cases? Do we then give up? No! We turn to the Lord and seek Him every day. He will not abandon those who are so persistent and confident in their faith, who pray to Him continually, and who always turn to Him! As Christians, it is also our responsibility to persevere in sharing the gospel and the love of God with those around us. When Christ returns, we want to be those who not only had a strong faith ourselves, but also shared it with others.

Our faith in God is a gift from Him. Let's make this gift the center of our lives, so that we may also confidently count ourselves among the people who are addressed in Hebrews 10: *But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but those who believe to the saving of the soul* (Hebrews 10:39).

Session 2 – Faith made visible

Welcome! We'll continue our exploration of Hebrews and what we can learn about faith in chapter 11. Let's read the first verse together:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

This chapter of the Bible, sometimes referred to as the "great faith chapter," starts off with a two-part definition of faith. First, *the substance of things hoped for*. Other translations say the **confidence** or **assurance** of things hoped for. The theologian Matthew Henry explains that, "the same things that are the object of our hope are the object of our faith...the expectation that God will perform all He has promised to us in Christ." This expectation is so strong that it gives these hopes substance in our soul. So we begin with this inner assurance of what God has promised to do.

In the second part of this verse, faith is *the evidence of things not seen*. This can be described as a certainty that there are realities that we cannot see with our physical eyes.

It seems clear from this definition that faith is not something that can be seen. However, the title of our session today is "Faith made visible." How can that be? All that God has promised in Christ – freedom from sin, loving relationships with God and others, peace, joy, and courage in the midst of trials – are made evident in the lives of those that walk by faith. This is explained in verse 2: *For by it [faith] the elders obtained a good testimony*. Their faith was visible in how they lived their lives. Who are these elders? The rest of the 11th chapter of Hebrews chronicles these faithful men and women of the Old Testament. Let's take a look at these examples.

Abel offered a sacrifice to God with a heart made righteous by faith. Enoch pleased God by faithfully walking with Him and being obedient to His will. Noah persisted through the hostilities of those around him when he built the ark out of godly fear and faith that God would bring the flood.

Hebrews 11 continues listing heroes and heroines of faith: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Rahab. Even the author states that he has run out of room to tell all the stories he would like. So what can we learn from these ancient people? The all-encompassing lesson is that faith makes people act differently than those around them. Abraham's faith gave his life purpose and destination. His destination was the land of Canaan, our destination is one that we should pray for daily; *Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*. Abraham and Sarah's faith in God's ability to give them a child, and then through God's request to sacrifice that child showed that their belief in the fulfillment of God's promises transcended death. This is also reflected in the faith of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph whose examples speak of death and things to come. Even though they realized that they would not see the fulfillment of God's promises before their death, they still oriented their lives and the lives of their children in anticipation of that promise. How patient is your faith? Do we still have faith in God's promises even if they are not fulfilled in our lifetime?

Moses' life teaches us about doubting our faith in God, referenced in 1 Corinthians 10:13:

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it.

As the Israelites were fleeing Egypt and were faced with the Red Sea, they began to question God's will for them to leave slavery behind and go to the Promised Land. They said, *for it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness* (Exodus 14:12). But Moses had faith in God, and *by faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were*

drowned (Hebrews 11:29). Sometimes we are tempted to lose faith in God when difficulties arise. Yet those who walk by faith dare to obey, even despite apparent obstacles.

In verses 32 through 38, the author of Hebrews starts to summarize those that he did not have time to write about; we hear of those who triumphed over fearful odds, those who were mighty in battle, but also those that were tortured and killed. For the faithful, the material things of this life were secondary to their faith in the promises of God. Faith in God doesn't mean that everything will be easy and perfect in life, but it does give us the comfort that we read of in 1 Corinthians, **but God is faithful**, and He is faithful to us.

And that is really the true lesson that we can gain from this chapter of Hebrews: not only the lessons from these men and women of the Old Testament, but first and foremost, that God is faithful! Their faith in Him was fulfilled by His faithfulness to them. This chapter therefore is not so much a record of man's faithfulness, but rather a beautiful and visible history of God's faithfulness to humanity.

Session 3 – Faith: Trained and Tested

As we continue our study on practicing our faith, we progress to Hebrews 12, where we'll see that our faith is trained and tested by God for our good, our holiness, our peace, and our righteousness. It is hard to grasp hold of the truth that our loving Heavenly Father allows afflictions that cause us suffering. But those who have persevered through challenges that rattle our faith know that our God uses these afflictions to help us develop the endurance we need to run the race of faith until we see Jesus face to face.

Chapter 12 begins with the word "Therefore," which indicates the conclusion of what has come before it: the roll call of the faithful in chapter 11. Verse 1 and 2 read: *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* Isn't it fascinating that after looking at the examples of all of these earthly heroes and heroines, the author says at the end, "Let's really look to the One who is the founder and finisher of our faith"? Our key to enduring is Jesus Christ. Through His atonement on the cross, and the great suffering He endured as God's just wrath was poured out upon Him, He leads His people to the finish line of faith. Christ's joy in His love for His Father and for us gave Him the strength to suffer. Are we consciously aware of the joy that is set before us? How does that help us keep our faith?

Keeping the faith is a fight to be fought and a race to be run. To be successful in any fight or race, we have to train. As children of God, we are trained through the pains of life. We are encouraged firstly to *lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us* (Hebrews 12:1). What are the things in your life that serve only to separate you from God and your desire to grow into the image of His Son? It is no doubt a painful process to identify and surrender these things, but it is worthwhile as we strive to transform and make sure our election. Be assured that by faith and the power of the Holy Spirit, you can break free and set aside those things.

What are the pains of life that cause us to suffer? In verse 3 we read, *For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.* Similar to Jesus, we suffer opposition from sin as we strive to be faithful to God and His will. Sinful adversaries continually attempt to steal us away from our relationship with God. We must be diligent in focusing on Jesus to keep ourselves from becoming weary and discouraged, which can so easily happen when challenges bombard us.

We also experience pain and trouble because our own sins and desires take us outside of the will of God. As the author continues in the following verses, we learn that another part of the pain of life we suffer is the discipline of our Father. We must never forget that God is in charge: our afflictions are in His hands, and they are the loving discipline of a perfect Heavenly Father. Listen to this excerpt of Hebrews 12:5-13: *And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son He receives." If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons;*

for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons... Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

These verses tell us that through all of our suffering, we are loved by God, and He is using our afflictions for good. We can find a constant comfort in the knowledge that our God is sovereign, He is in control of all things, and He wants the very best for us, which He has already provided in the gift of His Son. His discipline is for our profit, so we can be at peace in our soul, and may become holy and righteous.

Our training and our tests certainly will not be painless, but the pain fails in comparison to the joy that awaits us in the future. That's why the author of Hebrews directs us to keep our focus constantly on Jesus. Throughout the entirety of the book of Hebrews, it is made known that Jesus is superior to all things, including anything that could work to divide us from God. Take away from this chapter that you will be disciplined in your life because you are loved by God, and through the faith He has given you in Jesus Christ, you will endure and finish the race.

Session 4 – Faith at work

Welcome to the last small group session of August. In this session, we will finish our study of Hebrews by looking at what the author of this letter has to say about faith and works in Hebrews 13.

Let's recap for a moment why the author was writing this letter. "Hebrew" is a name applied to the Jewish people in Scripture. The book of Hebrews was written to those Jewish people who had come to believe in Jesus. However, they had started to turn away from Christ and return to some of their Jewish practices, and so they needed to be reminded of their faith and how to live in such a way that lifts Christ above everything.

Hebrews 13 outlines every way that we can live out our faith, based on the example of Christ Himself. This chapter begins with three foundational expressions of faith: love and care for others (v.1-3), preservation of marriage (v.4), and a contented attitude (v.5-6). These three aspects of faith reveal characteristics of Jesus that are evident in His life and teachings:

1. **His love for others, especially those who were often forgotten by society.** When you consider those that you love, such as family or friends, it becomes your desire to help them when they are struggling. But what about the people you really don't care for? Even if we might not like someone, we are still called to be loving, and as we serve them, we will eventually come to love them. Jesus' life serves as our example of how to share love with all types of people, even those we are still learning to love.
2. **His commitment to the Church and to His Father.** Jesus was so committed to His mission and the Father's will that He gave His own life to accomplish it. Through this, we can see how seriously God takes the commitments that we make, especially the one we make in marriage. And so we want to uphold the vow we made to our spouse, to behave honorably towards them, to be understanding, and to always be ready to forgive. Even if you are not married, all of these aspects of keeping our promises to others still stand as an expression of our faith.
3. **His firm faith in God's nature as the Provider.** In every moment when Jesus faced a struggle, He always trusted in His Father. This allowed Him to be content with whatever the outcome was. We see this in the garden of Gethsemane when He prayed to be spared from suffering and death, but still accepted His Father's will (Matthew 26:39). In our own moments of hardship, do we trust God? We might allow fear to come in, worried that we might not have all we need to get by. And when we are in moments of rest and happiness, do we trust God? Sometimes we allow jealousy to creep in, and start questioning why others have more than we do. When fear or jealousy sets in us, we are not content with what we have because we are too focused on what we don't have. But when we *are* content with our portion, we express our faith in God as the One who provides all we need.

Through Christ, every believer can come to practice these three expressions of faith. It is important that this visible part of our faith becomes part of our daily lives, particularly because we live in a society where Christians are judged not for what we say we believe, but for how we act. Are our actions consistent with the faith that we say we have? When we live out our faith in these three simple ways, others will be able to see that, yes, we do actually believe and practice what we say.

And as a church, unified under Christ, how can we express our faith together so that others see the power and truth of God? The author of Hebrews expands on this also in chapter 13. In verse 7, he writes, *Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you...* (Hebrews 13:7). Here, the author is focusing on past leaders. They set an important example for their people because their lives consistently pointed back to the ultimate example, Jesus Christ. When our leaders' own lives point to Jesus, we can understand that they are truly leading us to Jesus.

The call to honor leaders is clearly important to the author of Hebrews, as he repeats the command again in verse 17: *Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account* (Hebrews 13:17). Here, the author is speaking about the leaders the Hebrews had at the time the letter was written. Our leaders have a great task – they respond to our personal struggles, bring spiritual nourishment to the congregations, and make sure each soul is cared for. Leadership is a responsibility that requires wisdom and love. We can help to make this task a bit easier by supporting and praying for our leaders, which will build a more joyful congregation.

This support can be shown in many ways. When tension rises, we can pray together and seek the Spirit's guidance. When someone is down, we can encourage them and build them up. When a disagreement breaks out, we can be empathetic. When feelings are hurt, we can be ready to seek or offer forgiveness. All of these things help to make our congregations more loving, and allow our leaders' work in the congregation to be something that is done with joy. Working with each other in this way expresses our faith in the knowledge that God has placed us here for a reason.

Each expression of faith that is brought out in Hebrews 13 is evidence of the new life that we have in Christ. As individuals, and as a church, we want to continually express our faith through our acts of worship and serving. Not only do these works demonstrate our thanks to God for giving us the gift of faith, but they also let others see the transforming power that God has when we allow Him into our lives.