

# The Church Is Sent to Demonstrate Faith

**SESSION IN A SENTENCE:** God approves those who place faith in Jesus Christ.

**BACKGROUND PASSAGE:** Hebrews 11:1–12:2

Our focus in this session is faith. One of the reasons people in our culture do not understand the term *faith* is that many churches often talk about it but seldom define it or explain it. Yet God's church is to demonstrate faith by the way we trust Him and the way we live. Thus, in looking at the passages for this session, we should first define faith and then take up the challenge of walking in faith as Christ's church.



How has your understanding of what faith is changed over time?

# Group Time

## Point 1: Defining Faith (Heb. 11:1-2)

<sup>1</sup> Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen. <sup>2</sup> For by this our ancestors were approved.

Hebrews 11:1 provides us with a definition of biblical faith. Faith is not simply a crutch for the weak-minded, nor is it a false assurance based on a weak foundation. It is not a subjective feeling or fleeting hope. It is not based on opinion, wishful thinking, or elusive optimism that something will happen according to our plans. Rather, it is a solid certainty that God always keeps His word.

**Faith:** Biblical faith is the \_\_\_\_\_, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation. More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and \_\_\_\_\_ of the truth of the gospel, followed by a \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life. Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.



How would you contrast the way the Bible presents faith with how our culture thinks about the notion of faith today?

The writer of Hebrews reminded his readers that Old Testament followers of God also lived by faith, and by faith they “were approved” by God. This idea leads into the list of faith heroes beginning in Hebrews 11:4, but it also shows that faith brings God’s approval. He looks with favor on those who walk by faith; He delights when His people trust Him with full confidence and follow Him accordingly. We will see in the remainder of Hebrews 11 the names and stories of multiple men and women whose lives illustrated this kind of trust. They followed God in the present tense as they trusted His promises for tomorrow.

## Point 2: Being Approved Through Faith (Heb. 11:32-40)

<sup>32</sup> And what more can I say? Time is too short for me to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets, <sup>33</sup> who by faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> quenched the raging of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, gained strength in weakness, became mighty in battle, and put foreign armies to flight. <sup>35</sup> Women received their dead, raised to life again. Other people were tortured, not accepting release, so that they might gain a better resurrection. <sup>36</sup> Others experienced mockings and scourgings, as well as bonds and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup> They were stoned, they were sawed in two, they died by the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated. <sup>38</sup> The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and on mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground. <sup>39</sup> All these were approved through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised, <sup>40</sup> since God had provided something better for us, so that they would not be made perfect without us.

Often called the “Hall of Faith,” Hebrews 11 echoes with the words “By faith” and the stories of many who followed God with remarkable obedience. The focus of this discussion on faith turns from the names of people to the actions faith heroes took in following God. The actions are striking and powerful, inviting us to walk beside these faithful men and women even as we desire to do some of the same powerful works they did.



What Old Testament figures have inspired you to live by faith? Why?

The writer of Hebrews did not limit his illustrations to powerful, miraculous pictures. Instead, he shifted to include examples that illustrate that faith can be *costly*. Some followers of God lived in undesirable circumstances; others endured, pain, persecution, and execution. Yet these too lived—and died—by faith. They accepted their fate because their faith pointed them to the promise of resurrection; their future-tense assurance gave them strength in present-tense persecution.



How does faith in God transform our suffering?

### Point 3: Enduring in Faith (Heb. 12:1-2)

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, <sup>2</sup> keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Chapter 12 begins with “therefore”; the writer wanted to connect what he had previously written with his direction to run the race well. The setting of this race imagery is a sports arena, a grand amphitheater with a large crowd watching the racers. The great “cloud of witnesses” includes the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, whose lives and deaths reflected deep faith that persisted to the end, a testimony of the grace and power of God demonstrated through these examples of faith. Therefore, the readers of Hebrews are encouraged to press on in faith because they know others before them have persevered to the end.



#### Voices from Church History

“The cloud of witnesses had a course to run, and they ran it to the end. But their running cannot suffice for others. The picture is that of a relay race. Those who have run have passed on to us the redemptive purpose of God which must be carried forward in our generation, at the end of which we, in turn, shall pass it on to others.”<sup>1</sup>

—Herschel Hobbs (1907-1995)



How has the Christian life resembled an athletic competition in your experience?

To run this race, it matters that we listen to the guidance of the writer of Hebrews. We must lay aside anything that might hinder us from running well. In athletic imagery, the “hindrance,” or “weight,” might have been excess body fat or needless clothing that slowed the runner. In our spiritual life, we are to rid ourselves of anything that gets in the way of our following Christ. The image forces us to examine our own lives to see what things—whether good or bad—distract us from running with God.



# Daily Study

## Day 1: Read Hebrews 11:1-31

Known as the “Hall of Faith,” Hebrews 11 reminds us of men and women throughout Old Testament history who walked with God in faith. In particular, the chapter speaks of their faith being evident in what these heroes *did* on the basis of what they believed. Their actions demonstrated their faith.

Abraham is one of the more prominent examples in this list of heroes. On God’s command, he set out in search of a land God had already prepared for him. In fact, the passage tells us that he set out not even knowing where the land was. Apparently, only when he arrived in the place God had promised would he know he was there—which meant that his journey was a step-by-step, turn-by-turn, mile-by-mile walk of faith. Each foot in front of the other required leaning on God.

Actually, this is what faith is. It is not walking on our own path and then asking God to bless our direction. It is not recklessly marching forward without first seeking God. Nor is it cowering in fear when God says, “Go.” No, faith is keeping our eyes on Christ, trusting a perfect God to keep His Word, and following Him every step of the way.



How do we benefit from others showing us what it looks like to lead lives defined by faith?



### Voices from Church History

“My God, I bless thee that thou hast given me the eye of faith, to see thee as Father, to know thee as a covenant God, to experience thy love planted in me; For faith is the grace of union by which I spell out my entitlement to thee: Faith casts my anchor upwards where I trust in thee and engage thee to be my Lord.”<sup>3</sup>

—A Puritan prayer

## Day 2: Read Hebrews 11:32-40

Sometimes it is hard to understand why God included some of the names of faith heroes in Hebrews 11, names such as Gideon, Samson, and Jephthah, among others. We might wonder if we would have included these names in this list, but God did—and He is always right. Indeed, nobody in the list of Hebrews 11 was perfect. And that's the point.

These names remind us that God uses imperfect, sometimes rebellious, often erratic men and women of God who give evidence of faith at different points in their lives. In no way does He ever approve of our sin, nor does He look lightly on our inconsistent walk with Him. But God does, in grace, commend us for the times when we lean on Him and His promises to run the race well.

God works His plan through His people even when His people have much room to grow. That truth ought to make all of us hopeful and grateful.

 Why should reading of how God used imperfect (and erratic) men and women bring us encouragement as well as wonderment?

## Day 3: Read Hebrews 12:1-2

I have been a believer for more than 45 years, but I still remember the first time the gospel story grabbed my attention. I was not raised in a Christian home, and I had heard none of the Bible's teachings until a seventh-grade classmate told me about Jesus. He helped me to recognize my sinfulness, and then he directed me to God's solution: Jesus, the Son of God.

It really was an amazing story. Now, many years later, I'm still learning how to keep my eyes on Jesus. We must run the race with endurance to honor the One who will graciously lead us to the finish line. He truly is the "pioneer and perfecter" of our faith, and journeying with Him is worth the cost.

 Why must the cross and resurrection remain at the center of a Christian understanding of faith?

## Day 4: Read Hebrews 12:3-29

Living the Christian life is not always easy. Supernatural forces battle against us. The world rejects the gospel and often stands in opposition to biblical standards. Some believers around the world face what the original readers of the Book of Hebrews faced: persecution and trials. Just as Jesus faced hostility, His followers do also.

The Lord nonetheless uses suffering and trials to discipline us and teach us. He does that because He loves us as His children, and He wants us to reflect His holiness in our lives. Thus, allowing our arms to droop and our knees to wobble when this race is hard is not an option. Instead, we run together with other believers, provoking one another to persevere to the end. Indeed, those who refuse to obey God's Word risk His judgment. We must pursue peace, strive for holiness, and help even the weakest among us run the race.



How have you found it beneficial to learn about God's intentions behind our difficult circumstances to shape our character as His children?

## Day 5: Read Hebrews 13:1-25

The Christian life is practical; our beliefs are evident in our actions. For this reason, we must continually apply biblical teachings in our own lives. The writer of Hebrews helped his readers do that by concluding his book with a series of exhortations. For example, believers are to love each other, show hospitality to others, take care of believers in prison, be faithful in marriage, stay free from idolatry of money, and moreover, for believers to remember their leaders.

Enduring to the end also requires that others pray for us and we pray for them. Not only did the writer of Hebrews request prayer (v. 18), but he also wrote a benediction that was essentially a prayer for his readers. If you want to be faithful to the end in your walk with God, find some prayer partners to intercede for you daily—and you return the favor.



Why are we prone to overlook prayer as the most basic means through which God enables us to persevere in the faith?

