

SESSION 4

# VICTORIOUS FAITH



*What are some things you can't see  
but you know are there?*

**QUESTION #1**

## THE POINT

*My faith in God makes me victorious.*

## THE PASSAGE

Hebrews 11:1-6

## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

It's hard to know what to believe anymore. The Internet is filled with “news” on topics that range from politics to medicine to conspiracies, and all the writers tout their stories as true—even though the “facts” they are promoting contradict from each other. If you doubt what you read, someone will offer this jewel:

“It's hard to believe, but just accept it as true. Take it on faith.”

*Really?*

Is faith just jumping blindly into belief—or is it something more? Throughout the Bible, we see a whole different idea of faith. The writer of the Book of Hebrews captured the meaning of faith in a single chapter. In Hebrews 11, we're reminded of individuals who didn't just blindly believe something—and God called them to believe some pretty incredible things!

Let's embrace a different understanding of faith from what the world describes. Faith isn't just believing something without evidence. Hebrews 11 shows us real life examples of people who faced overwhelming situations and yet lived faithfully through them.

They were victorious because of their faith.

**Hebrews 11:1-3**

**1** Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen.

**2** For by it our ancestors won God’s approval.

**3** By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

**KEY WORDS:** **Our ancestors** (v. 2)—Literally “our elders,” in Hebrews 11 the Greek term refers to people who lived a long time ago.

Since the Christian life is a life of faith, let’s be real clear on what faith is. Verse 1 describes how faith works and what it does.

1. **Faith gives us confidence.** Faith has substance. It’s an assurance based on the reality of what God has done and said.
2. **Faith is an inward conviction.** We trust God and know He will do what He says He will do—because He always does.

Want an example? Let’s start at the beginning with the creation of the universe. The universe exists. It’s here for us to touch, see, and explore. Yet for all we have learned and keep learning about creation, science simply can’t answer the most fundamental questions about its existence.

While we would all agree the universe exists, not everyone knows why it exists. Is the universe merely a giant cosmic accident? Or is there some purpose or plan?

Christians know the answer to the “why” question because of our faith. “By faith we understand that the universe was created by

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the word of God.” He did it to provide a place where we could enjoy a relationship with Him. We can only understand this dimension of reality by hearing God’s Word and believing what He said. God spoke, and we take Him at His word. That’s faith.

The early church fathers considered nature the second “book” of God. By studying nature, we can understand some things about the Person of God; the same way studying a great work of art will tell us something about the artist. Consider, then, what God’s “work of art”—the universe—tells us about Him.

Nothing exists without something else first causing it. Our universe isn’t some accident of physics; it is the intentional work of God who reveals Himself first as Creator. As we understand God was faithful in the beginning in His work of creation, we then can believe He will be faithful to the future of His creation.

**How can the creation around us fuel our faith in the unseen God?**

### **QUESTION #2**

To highlight his point, the writer of Hebrews reminded us God made everything from nothing: “what is seen was made from things that are not visible.” God spoke and it came to be. In spite of what some people think, the powerful creative work of God does not contradict scientific evidence. Faith—that firm conviction in what God said—points us to the “why” behind all that scientific evidence: God spoke.

God started with nothing and brought all that exists into being from nothing. We can be confident and have faith God will continue to work His will in our world—and in our lives.

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## **Hebrews 11:4**

**4 By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was approved as a righteous man, because God approved his gifts, and even though he is dead, he still speaks through his faith.**

After the writer described faith in verses 1-3, he gave us several examples of those who demonstrated such faith. He provided a list of people who responded to God's word and work in their lives—and they responded “by faith.” These heroes of faith were people just like us who saw God working in their world and found ways—sometimes dramatic and courageous ways—to join God in His work. The message is clear: these people trusted God and endured confidently in Him. We can do the same.

The first real-life example of faith comes from the life of Abel. Abel's full story is recorded in Genesis 4:1-10; even unchurched people may be somewhat familiar with the story of Cain killing his brother Abel. Why did Cain kill his brother in a jealous rage? God accepted Abel's offering, “but he did not have regard for Cain and his offering” (v. 5).

What was the difference in their two offerings? We aren't told much, but the text offers hints. Abel was careful to choose the best of his flock to offer to God (v. 4). Cain seems to have been careless in what he chose to offer to God (v. 3). It wasn't the offerings themselves that made them acceptable or unacceptable; it was the attitudes behind those offerings.

As noted earlier, faith is confidence and trust in God; it is a response to who God is, what He says, and how He has worked. Abel expressed that confidence and trust—his faith—through his worship. His faith in God affected the way he made his offering. In his faith, Abel was sure to choose the best he had to bring before God.

On the other hand, Cain apparently did not show the same worshipful trust in God. Cain had no faith in God, and as a result, his offering was a ritual, not a true act of faith and worship. Cain's offering simply didn't mean much to him; therefore, it didn't mean much to God.

Our confidence that God alone is God and no one is like Him affects our choices and actions. Since no one is greater than God, why would we want to bring less than our best to Him? Abel understood this.

**What is the difference between Cain's and Abel's sacrifices?**

**QUESTION #3**

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### ***Hebrews 11:5-6***

**5** By faith Enoch was taken away, and so he did not experience death. He was not to be found because God took him away. For before he was taken away, he was approved as one who pleased God.

**6** Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

The writer of Hebrews referred to Enoch for his second example of a person who lived by faith. We know very little about Enoch, but what we do know is extraordinary.

The entire fifth chapter of Genesis is a genealogy that prepares to introduce us to another man of faith named Noah (Heb. 11:7; see also Gen. 6:1–9:29). As we read through the genealogy, we get the impression that life seemed to go on pretty normally: people were born, got married, had children, and died.

But then there was Enoch (Gen. 5:21-24). Enoch was the father of Methuselah—the oldest person recorded in Scripture—and then

when Enoch was 365 years old, “he was not there” (v. 24). “God took him away.” He never died. He simply went from walking with God in this life to walking with God in eternity. That’s all we’re told. The writer of Hebrews wrote that Enoch’s faith was the key to this new reality. Enoch’s faith—his confidence in God’s future—opened the moment for God to simply bring Enoch into a new future without experiencing death since he had “pleased God.”

**What characteristics describe a person who walks with God?**

#### QUESTION #4

### DIGGING DEEPER



#### TO BELIEVE

The Greek word *pisteuo* is translated “to believe.” One Greek-English dictionary gives as the primary definition of *pisteuo* “to consider something to be true and therefore worthy of one’s trust.” The level of trust one placed in a conviction could run from entertaining the possibility that something was true to complete confidence in the person or idea entrusted.

Most of the occurrences of the verb *to believe* in the New Testament are directed toward divine rather than human objects. Hearers believe in the gospel, believe in

Jesus, believe in His name, and believe in God. The common element in these occurrences is a conviction that something is true and worthy of trust. The object of the belief is often expressed with a “that” clause, stating the truth that someone believed: Peter believed that Jesus was the Holy One of God (John 6:69); Martha believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, the One coming into the world (John 11:27). The object can also be expressed with the Greek prepositions *en* or *eis*, both of which are usually translated by the English preposition *in*.

—Charles A. Ray, Jr., “To Believe,” *Biblical Illustrator*, Spring 2014, 73-74.

Like any good teacher, the writer of Hebrews stopped to emphasize his point. He made his point rather bluntly as if he were trying to make sure we're paying attention: "Without faith it is impossible to please God."

Why is that? The church has often stressed the priority of faith over works, and this passage helps us understand why faith takes priority. Without faith, works would never happen. There's no motivation to do anything if we don't "believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." We live the way we live because we know God exists. We do what we do because we are sure God is there. We live to please God because we believe God will reward those who seek him.

And what reward do we seek? Riches? Fame? No, we don't want anything so shallow or insignificant. We want the victory God gave Enoch—an eternity of walking with God. We seek God because we want the rewards only He can give. That is what Paul sought.

**"More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:8).**

Faith opens up our understanding to see that we find a different reality in God's presence. We find everything that is truly important in His presence: things like peace, love, joy, and hope. All that truly makes life worth living is found in the presence of Christ. We believe only God possesses these things and only He can make them part of our lives. Faith—confidence in who God is and what His coming kingdom has in store for His people—causes us to live our lives now the way we will live one day in heaven. A life of victory.

- ▶ A faith that pleases God makes us victorious.
- ▶ A faith that is confident God exists makes us victorious.
- ▶ A faith that knows God will reward our pursuit of Him makes us victorious.

Take time this week to read the rest of Hebrews 11. In addition to Abel and Enoch, you will see others who lived with confidence in God's existence, presence, and reward. Life was not easy—in fact, it

was very hard for them—but they confidently endured because they knew their faith in God would give them victory.

Whatever difficulty you are facing, you can be victorious in Christ. The men and women in Hebrews 11 have been down the road of difficulty too. Whatever challenges confront you; whether they are attacks from an unbelieving culture or the daily struggles of a life-robbing illness, take courage from the way these people responded in faith. Others have stood confidently in Christ—and you can too.

**Why is faith necessary for pleasing God?**

**QUESTION #5**

## **HEROES OF FAITH**

*Hebrews 11 lists several heroes of faith from the Old Testament. In the space below list people in your life, past and present, who you've admired for their faith.*

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What are some of the characteristics these individuals have in common?

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# LIVE IT OUT

How will you express faith this week?

- ▶ **Trust.** Trust Christ with the problems in your life. The One who created the entire universe can handle whatever you hand Him.
- ▶ **Read.** Read the Old Testament stories of the men and women mentioned in Hebrews 11. Read about their lives and find out how they expressed confident trust and faith in God. With each of their lives, ask yourself what you can personally learn from them.
- ▶ **Encourage.** Even as God uses the lives of individuals who lived by faith in Hebrews 11 to encourage us, be an encouragement to someone else. Encourage their faith and trust in Christ by telling them how you trusted Christ in a similar experience.



Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLvictory**