**Lesson Twelve: Faith**

(Have people share their outline of Hebrews 11)

Read Hebrews 11:1 and 1 Cor. 5:17. **Discuss the definition of faith.**

**How does it differ from belief?**

1. **Definition: Faith is our response to what God has done in Justification**.

According to Hasting’s Dictionary, the Old Testament words for faith are *"used mainly where the interest is not on an inward trust or feeling of safety but on a placing of confidence in the person, the words, the office of another."* (p.288) Standing on God's word and character is what makes us sure of what we do not see. This gives us a strong basis for our faith, rather than making a blind leap in the dark.

As Christian philosopher, theologian, and apologist Cornelius van Til has put it, our faith rests on two basic presuppositions:

* that God exists, and
* that He has made himself known through His word, the Bible.

This is where we must start: God has not given us the privilege of deciding what is true and what isn't! He is GOD! The history of His faithfulness was shown to all those listed in Hebrews l1.

Jesus is God's character and wisdom personified, "the Pioneer (Author) and Perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2)." Faith and believing are Jesus’ central themes in scripture. While not always explicit, faith and believing are the themes of his teaching in

* Matt 13: parables of the sower, of the wheat and tares, of the treasure buried in a field. **(Discuss what these parables say about faith)**
* In Mk 6: feeding the 5,000, Jesus walking on the water (vs. 52: “they were completely amazed, for they still didn’t understand the significance of the miracle of the loaves. Their hearts were too hard to take it in”).
* There are not many quotes of Jesus saying “Have faith,” but many mentions of people putting their faith in Him.
* The word “believe” is found extensively in the gospels: 7 times in Matt, 9 times in Mark, 9 times, 7 times in Luke, 40 times in John!! (John’s gospel is more concept driven) **(Share some examples that come to your mind)**

Our picture shows faith broken down into three components

1. The first element of faith is knowledge or ***NOTITIA***: the information that comes to us from our five senses, which God said in Romans chapters 1-2 was sufficient evidence for anyone to discover his existence and much about his nature/character. Many are “truth-seekers.”
   1. Finding the Truth is a necessary step in moving toward placing our trust in God. We cannot come to faith in a vacuum.
   2. There is historical evidence for Jesus’ birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection. We need to glean as much information as we can about him. Lots of head knowledge is available in the Bible, in seminars and books. In our education-oriented society, we like gaining knowledge.
   3. However, knowledge has no life in itself (dead flowers). Alone, it is not enough to give us faith.
2. The second step is ***ASSENSUS*** – root of our word “assent.” We decide whether the evidence we have, e.g. of the empty tomb, is true or false. This is the definition of “belief”; it is something we give our assent to, we agree.
   1. Examples: We believe in justice for the poor, we believe in equal pay for women, we believe in getting rid of the deficit, we believe in a life that begins at conception, we believe in strong families.
   2. Unless we move this heartfelt conviction into action, what does it accomplish? (That's why lobby groups are often a vocal minority, but get things done that may be opposed to the majority will).
   3. If I believe this is true, what am I going to do about it?

Believing is important - it is the basis for much in our lives, but it is only a beginning. As scripture points out, even the demons believe in God! Most Canadians/Americans/ Europeans "believe" in God and in prayer, many believe that the Bible is true and that Jesus rose from the dead, but how sad that so few are living out (acting) those beliefs!

*"There is nothing distinctively Christian about faith understood in the bare significance of 'seeing the invisible' - since even the demons believe and shudder'; the belief that contains no more is the 'dead faith' which condemns rather than justifies.*" Hastings Dictionary, p. 289.

1. The final step is ***FIDUCIA*** - trust. A living faith requires action, primarily placing ourselves into God's hands.

**An illustration:** a man falls off a cliff and grabs a branch on his way down. As he hangs precariously he cries out to God, “Please, save me!” To his surprise God answers, saying: “Do you believe that I am here, and truly can save you?” The man cries, “Yes Lord I do!” God’s response: “Then let go of the branch.” If we really believe there's an angel below us as we hang on the edge of the cliff, we have to let go.

Taking that step *is* a death – it is dying to myself, to my plans and dreams, dying to my security and safety, truly giving all up for God.

What does that actually look like in a life? Pam Sider’s reflections on Jenna’s cancer: Read “A Place of Indifference”

This is where doubt (fear?) enters in for many people: "What if I give my life to God/invite him to come into my heart, and nothing happens?" or "What if I have to change my life?" (which is actually a necessary thing: counting the cost).

Faith is Peter’s response to Jesus’ invitation to walk on water with him - he had to overcome fear (and logic) and get out of the boat.

But it doesn't stop even there - God’s call is a *continuous* call to obedience (thus proving our faith - **read James 2:14-26**): we have to walk by faith. God knows where he's leading, even if we don't. He is wise and good.

*“Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow…”* (Matt 6:34)

*“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish will give him a snake instead (or a stone instead of bread)?”*

*“If you who are evil know how to give good gifts, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts (or the Holy Spirit) to those who ask him?” (*Lk 11:11-13, Matt 7:11)

Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe!

1. **Where do we get faith?**
   1. According to **Eph. 2:8-9** (read it) it is a gift from God, (spiral of light around hand and arm) given to everyone who places their trust in God, and in extra measure to some as a gift of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:9). All are called to have faith, and as we need it and look to him for more, he gives it to us.
   2. It is something we must continue to pray for. Often the difficult circumstances we face are an opportunity to exercise faith. We see faith displayed powerfully in people like Corrie ten Boom and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Nelson Mandela and many more who are persecuted today, who suffer terribly, but allowed it to build their trust in their loving Father.
2. **What are the effects of faith?**

**Read the intro statement to our picture**:

* 1. **Understanding enlarged** - philosophers ask "Does God exist?" while his followers ask "What is his will?" True understanding only comes by faith and the Holy Spirit; as in marriage, you can't know what it's like until you make the commitment.
  2. **Treasures inherited and blessings claimed**: *"He rewards those who earnestly seek him"* (Heb. 11:6) - justification and sanctification, forgiveness of sins, inner and physical healing, needs met. We must be wary of the danger of going for the blessing, rather than God himself, and not "sell" Christianity on those grounds. We can be lured into thinking our lives should run more smoothly because we are living in obedience to him, and that is not necessarily so (review the list of those commended for their faith in Heb. 11. They looked forward to the Promise not having received it in this life, v. 39). ***He*** is our greatest blessing: *"to be with Him is heaven enough for me."* (Joni Erickson) **Discuss.**
  3. **Divine responsibility shouldered:** obedience is required. There is no cheap grace. Those commended in Hebrews 11 were acting on their faith, and many of them paid the ultimate price. These are real people whose lives *were* the drama, not something on the TV. Our obedience can have a powerful effect on people's lives (**give an example of how someone’s obedience has impacted you or yours on another’s life**)
  4. **Fear/frustration allayed** - "Fear is real! None escape its visits... but with the people of faith, when fear and anxiety call upon them, the visit is short. It is terminated when the promises of an Eternal Father are remembered and believed. He cares, He loves, He protects, He preserves, He watches over his children" (**Bethel Notes p. 111)** Gideon was fearful, but as he acted, his faith increased.

**Question:** **How do you deal with anxiety?** C.S. Lewis said that if you woke up not feeling like a Christian, but acted like one long enough, the feelings would follow. God will never disappoint us, given the perspective of time.

* 1. **Miracles fashioned, victories won** - **find examples from Hebrews 11 and our own lives**

In summary: *"Faith is the hand reached out to accept God's gifts of mercy extended from the cross of Christ."* (Hastings p. 290)**.** Our faith is a little shield (Eph 6:16) but God is a mighty fortress, and as we grow in faith we become increasingly like the One in whom we have faith: firm, reliable and immovable.

The lilies that finally adorn the wreath show the purity of a faith grown mature, as knowledge increases, assent becomes more absolute and trust is given without reserve to the one who is totally trustworthy.

Heb. 10:23: ***"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful."***