

**And faith is of things hoped for a confidence, of matters not seen a conviction ... (Hebrews 11:1; YLT)**

## **What Faith Really Is**

In this Essentials exploration of faith, I am going to use the 11th chapter of Hebrews, a survey of some of the Old Testament heroes of faith, as an outline for learning the unique aspects of it. I will allow the rich beauty of the word of God found here to be my guide for making known what "faith" really is.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.

By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him" [Genesis 5:24]; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. ...

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned. (Hebrews 11:1-7; 24-29)

The first verse provides *the* most succinct definition of faith in the Bible. Moreover, as we will see, the ensuing Old Testament examples illuminate this definition.

The key to a deeper understanding of the Hebrews 11:1 definition of faith is the Greek word,

*hypostasis*, translated here in English as “substance.” *Hypostasis* is the combination of two words which together essentially mean “confidence from a firm foundation.” “Substance” is a good translation because it implies that there is something real behind it. Many people are confident in many things that, in reality, have no real backing or substance to them. It is not so with real Biblical faith. This 11:1 definition tells us that there is “evidence” for these unseen things that are confidently hoped for.

Paul explained that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). Faith originates from believing what the Holy Spirit speaks or reveals. Reading or listening to the written word of God (Bible) incubates faith because the Holy Spirit teaches those of us who have ears to hear through it.

The firm, unseen foundation for faith comes from the Holy Spirit. ***Faith is believing in and acting on the tangible Spiritual revelation of the will of God that we are to live by.*** By “tangible Spiritual” I mean that the Holy Spirit has made it known in the spiritual realm. Its existence is real there. It is the will of God that has been made known to us. There are some things that the word of God (the Bible) reveals to all believers. There is a seemingly infinite number of additional things, unique to our lives, that the Holy Spirit makes known to churches and individuals. The word of God lays out God’s master plan for the church. The Holy Spirit is Jesus Christ the Commander in His church *now* dictating commands, plans, strategies, and so on. Through faith we carry out these commands. When we act on faith the Holy Spirit empowers us so that Jesus Christ can be revealed to the world.

Faith also comes through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit as a gift of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:9). Acts describes Stephen as “a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit” and Barnabas as “full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (Acts 6:5; 11:24). The empowerment of the Holy Spirit accelerates faith. *Ideally*, faith is not just a sequence of decisions and actions that we have to keep making, but a streaming life that we are constant in through the continuous filling of the Spirit.

After defining faith, the author of Hebrews pointed to Creation for a pattern of how faith works: “the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.” God, “who ... calls those things which do not exist as though they did (Romans 4:17)”, brings forth His invisible promises into our visible natural environment in the same way that He made the spiritual and natural universe through His invisible Word (John 1:3).

This pattern reveals that valid faith is rooted in God's unseen will that He visibly brings forth in His time. Acting by faith leads to the unseen plan of God coming to pass.

## Righteousness

"By faith Abel offered to a God a more excellent sacrifice," because he offered the blood of a lamb, the sacrifice that God had directed. By trusting God and faithfully obeying *His* leading and not his own like Cain, this caused Abel to become righteous and granted him eternal life, as the verse declares: "through it be being dead (physical body only) still speaks (spirit-soul is now alive in heaven).

Abel "obtained witness that he was righteous" through *faith*. He demonstrated his faith by sacrificing a lamb and thus acting on God's chosen prescription for covering his sin. Abel was following the pattern for righteousness that God would ultimately perfect, once and for all, in the sacrifice of His Son, the Lamb of God (John 1:29-36). Romans makes it clear that righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ:

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, **through faith in Jesus Christ**, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, **through faith**, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier **of the one who has faith in Jesus**. (Romans 3:21-26)

Noah "became heir of the righteousness *which is according to faith*" because he acted on a divine warning "of things not yet seen" to prepare an ark. Faith puts us in right standing (righteousness) with God and on the right foundation form which we can follow Him.

## Pleasing God Requires His Will

We are told that, through faith, Enoch pleased God and his testimony was used as an introduction to the following important verse:

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Without faith it is *impossible* to please God. Let that sink in ...

Why is it impossible to please God without faith? To answer that question, let us go back to my definition:

Faith is believing in and acting on the tangible Spiritual revelation of the will of God that we are to live by.

Faith is acting on the revealed *will* of God so it is impossible to please Him unless we are doing His will. This explanation makes it clear that faith is *not* doing whatever we want and putting God's name on it, it is doing His will that the Spirit has specifically revealed to us. If it is not by faith, then it is man's idea and man's ideas are dead religious works that do not please God.

## Take Heed How You Hear

One of the most prominent aspects of the Gospels is Jesus' intense focus on faith. He demands it from His followers and it is essential to unlocking the mysteries of the kingdom of God that He presents. Let's dig into this in the 8th chapter of the Gospel of Luke:

And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable: "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold." When He had said these things He cried, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Then His disciples asked Him, saying, "What does this parable mean?"

And He said, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that 'Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand' [Isaiah 6:9]." (Luke 8:4-10)

After subsequently translating this parable to His disciples, Jesus finished with the following statement: "But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, *having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience*" (8:15).

Jesus' Parable of the Sower epitomizes the teaching, "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" in allegorical form. When the word of God is sown into our lives we have the option of keeping it which is exercising faith.

After finishing the parable, Jesus exclaimed loudly: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" This reminds me of what He told each of the seven churches in the Revelation of Jesus Christ: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). This is an ardent call by the Lord for disciples to appropriate, by faith, what the Spirit is saying so that it enters into the heart and leads to fruit bearing action.

After explaining the parable, Jesus went on declaring:

"No one, when he has lit a lamp, covers it with a vessel or puts it under a bed, but sets it on a lamp stand, that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light. Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him."

The lighting of a lamp here is a reference to the believer being empowered by the Holy Spirit. When a man, "having heard the word with a noble and good heart," keeps it, a recognizable change will come forth in his life. It is to this man, that more will be given. Whatever the true nature of the individual is will come to light. Each tree will be known by its fruit.

The man whose heart responds like the rocky or thorny ground seems to have faith, but because he does not "keep it" or prove it through endurance, "even what he seems to have will be taken from him."

A few verses later, Luke picked up with the following account:

Now it happened, on a certain day, that He got into a boat with His disciples. And He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side of the lake." And they launched out, But as they sailed He fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water, and were in jeopardy. And they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!"

Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm. But He said to them, "Where is your faith?"

And they were afraid, and marveled, saying to one another, "Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!"(Luke 8:16-25)

Some of the disciples were seasoned fisherman who would have been familiar with the adverse weather conditions on the lake. Their terror about this situation could imply that there was an added supernatural dimension at play (Satan) as Jesus lay asleep. Either way, Jesus did not coddle the disciples in this situation but rebuked them for their lack of faith. We can thus surmise that *there is no excuse for fear*. Fear implies the absence of faith and "without faith it is impossible to please Him." Matthew recorded Jesus as saying, "Why are you *fearful*, O you of little faith? (8:26a)" The Greek word *deilos*, translated here in English as "fearful," appears three times in the New Testament, the last of which is in the following verse:

"But the **cowardly**, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8)

By extension we can interpret the disciples lack of faith as a flirtation with cowardice. Often times, fear leads to selfish actions. More critically, a lifestyle of fear reveals that a person does not really know Him Who can and will alter our physical environment to protect us. Let us explore this more as we examine aspects of the Parable of the Talents.

Now as they heard these things [Jesus declaring that Zacchaeus was saved (by faith)], He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. Therefore He said: "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business till I come.' But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.'

"And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned ten minas.' And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.' And the second came, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned five minas.' Likewise he said to him, 'You also be over five cities.'

"Then another came, saying, 'Master, here is your mina, which I have kept put away in a handkerchief. For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.' And he said to him, 'Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow. Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?'

"And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to him who has ten mins.' (But they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas.')

'For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me.'" (Luke 19:11-27)

In this parable, Jesus is the nobleman, the citizens are Israel, and the servants are those professing to follow Jesus as they all called the nobleman "Master."

Before leaving to receiving for himself a kingdom, the nobleman gave each of his servants a sum of his money to conduct business with for his account. When he returned, he called these servants to him to see how much profit they made for him.



Let me pause here for a paragraph of comment which, as a [professional investor](#), I cannot pass up. In our fallen world, the business world is fraught with risk. To overcome this risk, be profitable, and multiply profit, the Lord's servants must make strategic use of the talent and resources given to them. The Spirit of the Lord provides the strategy. Faith is the relentless execution of this strategy. Love for the Lord causes us to devote our lives to Him. Faith causes our lives to be profitable for His glory.

Notice what the first and second servants told the nobleman: 'Master, *your mina has earned ten minas*' and 'Master, *your mina has earned five minas*.' Both of these servants understood three things: (1) the mina is the Master's, (2) I did not earn anything, and (3) the mina inherently has a profitable outcome to it that comes from the Master through faith. Thinking even deeper about these three components, here we have (1) humility, (2) grace, and (3) faith in operation together. Humility positions a believer in the unmerited favor (grace) of God to live His revealed life by faith. For more on this, read my teaching [Humility and Faith](#) which is a critical supplement to this Essentials teaching. It covers some additional faith-related passages in the greater depth needed to extract the true riches from them.

The nobleman's response included the phrase, "because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities." Elsewhere, Jesus said: "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much" (Luke 16:10). The point is this: *faithfulness is not quantifiable*. This implies that faithfulness comprises certain rich character traits that cause the individual to act with the same moral rectitude, regardless of the situation.

According to [Thayer's Lexicon](#), the use of the Greek word *pistos*, translated here in English as "faithful," implies "persons who show themselves faithful in the transaction of business, the execution of commands, or the discharge of official duties." Faith includes the carrying out of commands. Too many believers view faith as simply trusting God when the focus of faith needs to be faithful diligence in carrying out His revealed plans. This harkens to what James famously wrote: "Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (2:17).

Finally, we have the third servant about which we are given the following two important pieces of information:

- He put the Master's mina away in a handkerchief and did nothing with it (the King James

translates this “napkin” and I once referred to this as “napkin investing”).

- He said he feared the Master because he is an “austere man” who collects what he did not deposit and reaps what he did not sow.

The nobleman responded, “Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant.” What exactly did he mean by this?

The nobleman is not really an austere man. The servant said this because he *did not know him*. He did not know him because he was faithless. *Faithful service of the Master causes us to know Him personally*. This servant’s lack of faith caused him to instead be fearful—doing nothing with what the Master’s resources—and selfish—serving himself, deceived into thinking that what was the Master’s is his own. The nobleman judged him by his words which revealed a complete lack of faith in his heart. He still had the wicked nature of sin and was unrighteous.

Finally, the nobleman, clearly revealing his anti-Communist tendencies, boldly exclaimed: “to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.” This connects us back to what I referenced earlier, when Jesus said almost the same thing:

“Therefore take heed *how you hear*. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he *seems to have* will be taken from him.” (Luke 8:18)

The person who responds seriously to the Master’s words hears His voice, lives by faith, knows the Master personally, and is given more strategic direction. The person who does not respond seriously to the Master, does not hear His voice, is faithless, does not come to know Him, and his fake show of a Christian life (“what he seems to have”) ends up worthless (“taken from him”).

In contrast to the third servant, consider the following account of Noah as we return to our Hebrews 11 outline:

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. (11:7)

Noah, upon receiving revelation from the Holy Spirit, by faith “moved with godly fear.” A faith-

filled person exudes reverence of the Lord and not the irreverential fear of Him characteristic of someone who does not know Him.

## Of Whom The World Was Not Worthy

The final character in our introductory outline of faith is Moses. Recall the following:

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned. (Hebrews 11:24-29)

Moses' faith caused him to choose a life of affliction and reproach in following the Lord rather than worldly riches and the fleeting pleasures of sin. The rejection of the world alongside a longing for heaven is a commonality amongst people of faith. Concerning the Old Testament heroes of faith, Hebrews summarizes:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. **But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country.** Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:13-16)

Moreover, people of faith who reject the world's [system](#), overcome great obstacles and experience miraculous results through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Moses led Israel "through the Red Sea as by dry land." It is easy to live recklessly for God when you have nothing

to lose in this life. This brings us to our final passage in Hebrews which recaps the glories and trials of those “of whom the world was not worthy”:

And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to fight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again.

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trials of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. (Hebrews 11:32-40)

This brings me to my concluding assertion: faith will put you on a roadmap to a destiny that is contrary to this world. We should expect God to do wild and crazy things on His path where we simply do not fit in.

## **Summary of Faith Learnings**

I will conclude this Essentials teaching with a recap of 8 key faith takeaways covered therein:

1. Faith is believing in and acting on the tangible Spiritual revelation of the will of God that we are to live by.
2. When we act on faith the Holy Spirit empowers us so that Jesus Christ can be revealed to the world.
3. It is faith in Jesus Christ alone that makes us righteous before God.

4. Faith is required to please God because faith entails doing His will and not man's will.
5. Fear implies the absence of faith and there is no excuse for fear.
6. Fear leads to selfishness, whereas faith is the relentless execution of God's strategy that is profitable for His glory.
7. Faith includes the carrying out of commands. Through faithful service of the Master we come to know Him personally.
8. Faith causes us to live contrary to the world and makes us witnesses of God's extraordinary power.