

Faith and Righteousness

Devotional Reading: [Romans 5:12–21](#)

Background Scripture: [Hebrews 11](#)

[Hebrews 11:1–4a, 7a, 8, 17–18, 20–23, 32, 39–40](#)

¹ Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ² This is what the ancients were commended for.

³ By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

^{4a} By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did.

^{7a} By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.

⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, ¹⁸ even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.”

²⁰ By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.

²¹ By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph’s sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

²² By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones.

²³ By faith Moses’ parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.

³² And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets,

³⁹ These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, ⁴⁰ since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

Key Text

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.—Hebrews 11:1

Faith That Pleases God

Unit 2: Learning About Faith

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. State the definition of faith.
2. Explain the meaning and significance of the key verse.
3. List one change each in the categories of thought, behavior, and speech by which he or she will become more of a stranger to the world.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Listening to the Trustworthy Voice
- B. Lesson Context

I. Faith Explained (Hebrews 11:1–4a)

- A. Definition (vv. 1–2)
- B. Foundations (vv. 3–4a)

II. Faith Lived Out (Hebrews 11:7a, 8, 17–18, 20–23, 32)

- A. Noah (v. 7a)
The Value of Fear
- B. Abraham (vv. 8, 17–18)
- C. Isaac (v. 20)
- D. Jacob (v. 21)
- E. Joseph (v. 22)
- F. Amram and Jochebed (v. 23)
- G. Others (v. 32)

Faith in a Blessed Future

III. Promises Because of Faith (Hebrews 11:39–40)

- A. Not Received (v. 39)
- B. Something Perfect (v. 40)

Conclusion

- A. The Faith of Imperfect People
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

Amram	<i>Am-ram.</i>
Barak	<i>Bair-uk.</i>
Canaan	<i>Kay-nun.</i>
Ephraim	<i>Ee-fray-im.</i>
Gideon	<i>Gid-e-un (G as in get).</i>
Ishmaelites	<i>Ish-may-el-ites.</i>
Jephthah	<i>Jef-thuh (th as in thin).</i>
Jochebed	<i>Jock-eh-bed.</i>
Manasseh	<i>Muh-nass-uh.</i>

Introduction

A. Listening to the Trustworthy Voice

I remember a particular game we played during youth group. Someone would be blindfolded and assigned specific tasks to accomplish; another person would be designated as a guide but was allowed only to speak instructions to the one who was blindfolded. The job of other people in the room was to cause distractions by shouting, making noise, giving wrong instructions, etc. The blindfolded person had to have faith in the guide and listen to only the guide.

God functions much like the guide in that game, and he has proven himself trustworthy. We may desire to do something that our limited vision tells us is edifying and appropriate. But if we are listening to our guide and trusting his voice above all else, we may discover otherwise.

B. Lesson Context

When reading a text, it's always a good idea to know the purpose for which it was written. The natural approach is to look for a clear purpose statement, such as in [Luke 1:3–4](#) and [John 20:30–31](#). The book of Hebrews, however, has no such statement. So the book's purpose must be inferred from its contents. The extended comparisons and contrasts of Jesus with Old Testament personalities, the Levitical priesthood, angels, etc., signify the purpose being to encourage wavering and persecuted Christians of Jewish background to stand firm in Christ and not retreat into Judaism. Beyond this relatively certain conclusion, there is no consensus about who wrote this book or when.

Regarding the date of writing, we have some certainty that the book cannot have been written after AD 96 because Clement of Rome seems to quote from it up to four times while writing his epistle

to the Corinthian church. The book of Hebrews also discusses the worship within the temple as though such a structure were still in existence, so a date prior to the temple's destruction in AD 70 is likely.

Questions of authorship, date, and provenance aside, what is clear from the contents of Hebrews is that the addressees were in danger of giving up due to their suffering for having faith in Christ ([Hebrews 10:32–39](#)). Today's study begins immediately after that danger is addressed.

I. Faith Explained ([Hebrews 11:1–4a](#))

A. Definition (vv. 1–2)

1. Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

Ancient Greek words translated as *faith*, *faithful*, and *faithfulness* occur some 316 times in ancient New Testament manuscripts. The 37 occurrences of these words in the book of Hebrews comprise almost 12 percent of the 316. However, Hebrews constitutes only about 3.6 percent of the New Testament. Clearly, the subject of faith is vital to the author, thus his offer of the definition we see here.

The concept of faith is complex, not reducible to a single definition. For example, the phrase “the faith” used in [Jude 3](#) refers to a body of doctrine to be believed. But that is not the sense in the text before us now. A key to understanding what the writer of Hebrews intends is the word translated *confidence*. The writer emphasizes faith as the appropriate response to the eternal rewards God has promised. Hope and confidence are also connected in [Hebrews 3:6](#).

The writer emphasizes this in the phrase that follows, using terms that enhance the two ideas in the first half of this verse. One enhancement is the movement from the word *faith* to the word *assurance*; the latter word is to be understood in the sense of “verification” or “certain persuasion.” Another enhancement is the movement from the phrase *what we hope for* to the phrase *what we do not see*; the latter more precisely describes the desired result of hope. The Christian's ultimate hope is not in anything in the present, visible world ([John 17:16](#); [James 4:4](#); [1 John 2:15](#)). Rather, our hope is in the unseen eternal reality yet to come ([2 Corinthians 4:18](#)).

Belief and faith are closely related, but faith is the stronger of the two concepts (compare [James 2:19](#)). The writer is setting the stage for the numerous illustrations of this fact.

What Do You Think?

How will you live in faith that God will be present with you in the upcoming week?

Digging Deeper

How does the definition of *faith* in [Hebrews 11:1](#) assist you in facing daily circumstances?

2. This is what the ancients were commended for.

The ancients are the Old Testament faithful, and the word *this* refers to their faith as just defined in the previous verse. God is the one who *commended* them for their faith (the same word is translated

“spoke well of” in [Hebrews 11:4b](#), not in our printed text). With this observation, the writer both begins and ends (see [11:39](#)) what has come to be called the “Hall of Faith.”


B. Foundations (vv. 3–4a)

3. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

Faith is necessary to understand things that are real but cannot be observed, such as God’s creating *the universe*. This faith is not “blind faith,” which is a belief in something without evidence to support that belief. Instead, what we’re talking about is faith based on evidence. Since the evidence of God’s holy character and limitless power have been established many times over, we can trust that his account of the creation of the cosmos—unseen by humans—is true. That’s faith based on evidence, not blind faith (compare [John 20:30–31](#)).

4a. By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did.

This account is found in [Genesis 4](#). Abel *brought* the best of his flock, while Cain “brought some of the fruits of the soil” ([4:3](#)). The different types of offerings were in accordance with the brothers’ respective occupations per [Genesis 4:2](#). God’s favor on Abel and not Cain was because Abel brought his best, not keeping it for himself. As a result, he is known as “righteous Abel” ([Matthew 23:35](#)), while Cain—who murdered his brother ([Genesis 4:8](#))—is infamous as a negative example ([1 John 3:12](#); [Jude 11](#)).



Will you
live by
faith?

Sheet 5—Winter 2024, *Adult Resources*, Standard Lesson Quarterly® Curriculum

Photo © Getty Images

Lesson 6

Visual for [Lesson 6](#). While reading [Hebrews 11:40](#), have this posted and ask for specific examples of circumstances that require us to live by faith.

II. Faith Lived Out ([Hebrews 11:7a, 8, 17–18, 20–23, 32](#))

A. Noah (v. [7a](#))

[7a](#). By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.

Noah's account is found in [Genesis 6–9](#). Building the *ark* was no small exercise in faith! The expression of *things not yet seen* is connected with the beginning of [Hebrews 11:1](#). Thus, Noah's *faith* was based on the word of God concerning the flood, which Noah was not yet able to see.

The Value of Fear

Jason felt increasingly isolated at his high school as more and more of his friends began dabbling

in recreational drugs, underage drinking, and premarital sex. As Jason resisted those temptations, his friendships dwindled.

One thing kept Jason from following their path: fear. Jason's dad repeatedly warned him of the consequences of substance abuse and sexual immorality. Jason feared for his physical health and dreaded the thought of disappointing his father.

The spiritual consequences can be more devastating, however. God sees everything we do, hears everything we say, and knows every thought we think. The Bible speaks of "fearing God," "fearing the Lord," etc., at least 80 times. A holy fear of God that directs our actions, speech, and thoughts is as appropriate today as it was for Noah. As Jesus said, "Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him" ([Luke 12:5](#)). How do we keep from domesticating God so that we give no thought to fearing him?

—D. D.

B. Abraham (vv. 8, 17–18)

8. By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

The call of *Abraham* is found in [Genesis 12:1–3](#), with the man's walk of faith recorded from [12:4](#) through [25:11](#) (compare [Acts 7:1–7](#)). Abraham had to trust the unseen, invisible God rather than the visible, fictitious gods (idols) of his culture. And he did so as he departed for an unknown land several hundred miles distant. Considering that Abraham was the man who "believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness" ([Genesis 15:6](#)), it is certainly fitting that he is included on this list.

But that doesn't mean Abraham never sinned (see [Genesis 16:3–4](#); [12:12–13](#); [20:2](#)). As we consider the faith-walk of several members of the Hall of Faith, we will remind ourselves that they were not without flaws.

17–18. By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."

This account of the near-sacrifice of *Isaac* by *Abraham* is detailed in [Genesis 22](#); a much-abridged version is found in [James 2:21](#). Both passages focus on how the man's faith was evidenced by action. When God commanded him to sacrifice his son, Abraham arose early in the morning in obedience ([Genesis 22:3](#))—no delay. Abraham reasoned that God could raise Isaac from the dead ([Hebrews 11:19](#)). While there are certainly resurrections predicted and recorded in the Old Testament, none are noted as occurring as far back as in the time of Abraham, who lived about 2000 BC (see [1 Kings 17:17–23](#); [2 Kings 4:18–37](#); [13:21](#); [Isaiah 26:19](#); [Daniel 12:2](#)). Perhaps Abraham believed that God was willing and able to do something that Abraham had never seen or heard of. The last line of the text at hand quotes [Genesis 21:12](#).

What Do You Think?

How can you manage the emotions of disappointment, grief, or anger that may arise when God's will

doesn't make sense?

Digging Deeper

Who can you turn to for wise counsel when God's will doesn't make sense?

C. Isaac (v. 20)

20. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.

After *Isaac* was born in about 2067 BC, he grew up to become the father of *Jacob and Esau*, twins born in about 2007 BC. Isaac, like his father Abraham, was something of a mixed bag of character traits. Isaac obeyed God *by faith* (see [Genesis 26:1–6](#)), but Isaac also adopted his father's practice of deception ([26:7](#)). He was also guilty of the parental error of favoritism ([25:28](#)). God sometimes uses people in his service despite themselves.

Jacob and Esau were born to Isaac and Rebekah. This family wrestled with the sins of deceit and favoritism (see [Genesis 25:28; 26:7](#)). However, when it appeared that God's plan might be in danger as a result of these situations, the author of Hebrews reminds us that God was still at work. Isaac blessed his sons, looking forward to how God used them in his plan ([27:27–40](#)). Some scholars believe that Jacob is mentioned before Esau because it was through the lineage of Jacob that the promise would be fulfilled in Christ.

D. Jacob (v. 21)

21. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

This verse is a quotation from [Genesis 47:31](#). The quotation here may not fully match up with [47:31](#) in your Bible because the writer is quoting from the Septuagint, the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament. When *Jacob* blessed both of Joseph's *sons*, he essentially adopted them as his own. As a result, 2 of the 12 "landed" tribes of Israel descend from them: the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh ([Joshua 14:4](#)). Jacob's *faith* is evidenced by his worship of God, which he continued to his deathbed. His sins involved deception ([Genesis 27:18–24](#)), manipulation ([25:29–33; 30:37–43](#)), and favoritism ([37:3–4](#))—but the Lord used him in service nevertheless!

E. Joseph (v. 22)

22. By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones.

This verse reiterates [Genesis 50:24–26](#). In about 1899 BC, Joseph's brothers sold him to Ishmaelites when he was 17 years old; in turn, the Ishmaelites sold him into Egyptian slavery ([37:2, 28](#)). At age 30, Joseph had been appointed second-in-command in Egypt ([41:46](#)), facing numerous challenges to his *faith* in the intervening years.

As we see the phrase *the Israelites* (translated more literally as "children of Israel" in the *KJV*), we may immediately think of Israel as the organized nation it would become 430 years later, after the

exodus ([Exodus 12:40–41](#)). But we should not lose sight of the fact that Israel in this context refers specifically to Joseph’s father, Jacob, who had his name changed to Israel ([Genesis 32:28](#); [35:10](#); [46:8](#)), thus speaking of Jacob’s family rather than a fully formed nation.

Joseph’s directive *concerning the burial of his bones* was that they not be left in Egypt when the exodus occurred ([Genesis 50:24–25](#)). This directive was rooted in God’s promise made to his father Jacob, grandfather Isaac, and great-grandfather Abraham concerning possession of the land of Canaan ([15:7](#); [48:3–4](#); [Exodus 6:8](#); etc.).

What Do You Think?

How can you be a blessing and encourage a younger person this week?

Digging Deeper

What role does sharing our faith have in blessing those around us according to [Galatians 3:9](#)?

F. Amram and Jochebed (v. 23)

23. By faith Moses’ parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.

This passage treats the lives of Abraham and Moses as journeys of faith. Thus they are the prominent figures presented in today’s lesson. The extended version of the fact noted by the writer of Hebrews is found in [Exodus 2](#). We note that the *faith* of Moses’ *parents* is at issue here, not the faith of Moses himself. According to [Exodus 6:20](#), the parents’ names are Amram and Jochebed.

The phrase *no ordinary child* is a complex expression. Some think it means “beautiful.” It may carry the sense that Moses’ parents had an awareness that the child would grow to be someone special. The Hebrew word behind this phrase in [Exodus 2:2](#) is merely the typical word for “good.”

The *edict* of the “new king [in Egypt], to whom Joseph meant nothing” ([Exodus 1:8](#)) initially stated that all newborn Hebrew boys were to be killed ([1:16](#)). When this directive was disobeyed, the king tried again by requiring that “every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile” ([1:22](#)). Since baby Moses was put into a waterproof ark before being cast into the Nile River, the parents had obeyed this command—technically speaking!

What Do You Think?

How do you trust God even when you can’t immediately see the results of his plans?

Digging Deeper

How do the examples of Hall of Faith encourage you in that regard?

G. Others (v. 32)

32. And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets.

The Hall of Faith continues, as the writer ensures that readers don’t think the importance of faith

ended with Moses. Instead, exercises of faith continued through the centuries. The story of *Gideon* is found in [Judges 6–8](#). He served as a judge from 1192 BC to 1152 BC. He’s most notable for his 300-man force defeating the Midianite army. *Barak*—a contemporary of Deborah, who judged from 1239 BC to 1199 BC—raised an army to defeat the Canaanites, according to [Judges 4](#). *Samson* served as judge from 1075 BC to 1055 BC; his opposition to the Philistines is found in [Judges 13–16](#). The leadership of *Jephthah* against the Ammonites is recorded in [Judges 11–12](#); his judgeship extended from 1086 BC to 1080 BC.

The extensive record of *David* (reigned 1010–970 BC) runs from [1 Samuel 16](#) through [1 Kings 2](#). The ministry of *Samuel*—who is pivotal for being the last of the judges and the first of *the prophets*—is found in [1 Samuel 1–25](#). These individuals of faith were not faultless, however.

Faith in a Blessed Future

Sheila didn’t say much anymore. An 80-square-foot room in the local nursing home had become her dwelling. The 93-year-old woman had outlived her husband and two sons, so she didn’t have many visitors. Sheila’s failing eyesight and memory made Bible-reading increasingly difficult. Her circumstances seemed to be some of the saddest in the nursing home.

Yet Sheila had developed a surprising reputation among the nursing-home staff. In the few times daily that she did speak, she would communicate joy with her soft voice, weathered by life.

“I waited 18 years to marry my husband,” she would say. “I won’t have to wait that long to see my Shepherd.”

Sheila has since joined the “great cloud of witnesses” of [Hebrews 12:1](#), a group whose lives were informed by a future they couldn’t see. How does your faith compare with Sheila’s?

—D. D.

III. Promises Because of Faith ([Hebrews 11:39–40](#))

A. Not Received (v. 39)

39. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised,

The writer repeats the thoughts of [Hebrews 11:13](#) (not in today’s lesson text) but in a condensed form. The word translated *were all commended* is the same as that in [Hebrews 11:2](#), above; it carries the idea of “having been witnessed” doing something through *faith*. Since the faith of those being considered looked ahead to the arrival of Jesus, which did not come about in their lifetimes, *none of them received what had been promised* (contrast [Matthew 13:16–17](#)). But they had faith nonetheless.

B. Something Perfect (v. 40)

40. since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they

be made perfect.

The *better* thing is the promise fulfilled in the earthly mission of Christ. Both we and *they* are *made perfect* in his suffering ([Hebrews 2:10](#); [5:8–9](#); [7:28](#)). In combining such facts with the conjunction “therefore” that begins the next verse, [Hebrews 12:1](#), the author prepares the readers to relate the Old Testament Hall of Faith to themselves.

What Do You Think?

What are some examples of knowledge and resources we have today that the heroes of the past could have never imagined?

Digging Deeper

How do you think God would like you to use these blessings?

Conclusion

A. The Faith of Imperfect People

The writer of Hebrews selected some very faithful people as examples, people who also had some significant imperfections.

We are to walk faith and not by sight ([2 Corinthians 5:7](#)), and this should be easier for us than for the Old Testament luminaries. They lived with only a promise and a hope, while we live with the cross and resurrection as accomplished facts ([1 Peter 1:12](#)). But although we are privileged to see much more of God’s plan fulfilled, some promises remain to be fulfilled—a resurrection body, a new heavens, a new earth, etc. Many times we must make decisions without being able to see their results. A faith-based decision is based on believing the promises of God and determining to do what God has called you to do, regardless of how it might look in your eyes or the eyes of others. May the Holy Spirit empower us to do so!

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for these faithful servants of yours whose deeds inspire us in our faith. May we prove to be at least as faithful as they were. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Faith overrides
imperfections!

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#) (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity

Into the Lesson

Place learners in pairs, blindfold one person in each pair, and station pairs around the room. Set a container of candies on a table. Instruct the “seeing” partners to verbally guide their blindfolded partners to the container to pick out two pieces of candy and return to their seats. (*Option.* If learners have mobility limitations, set pairs at a table before they are blindfolded. Then put out containers of candy within reach of the blindfolded person.)

Alternative. Distribute a blank piece of paper and copies of the “What Is Unseen” exercise from the activity page, which you can download, to half of the class. Instruct them to find a partner that did not receive the exercise and complete it as indicated. Tell learners who received the exercise to read the instructions carefully without showing the page to their partners.

After either activity, say, “Sometimes it is hard to do things before we have all the information or know how it will end. In today’s lesson, notice how each person’s actions were evidence of faith.”

Into the Word

Read [Hebrews 11:1](#) aloud. As a class, use the verse to create a definition of *faith*. Write the definition on the board. Ask a volunteer to read aloud [Hebrews 11:1–4a](#), [7a](#). Divide participants into three groups: **God’s Command Group** (v. 3), **Abel Group** (v. 4), and **Noah Group** (v. 7a). Challenge the groups to study their verse and determine how the definition of faith from [Hebrews 11:1](#) relates to their example verse. Reconvene the class and ask the following question for whole-class discussion: “Which of these three acts of faith would you personally find most difficult to do, and why?”

Alternative 1. Distribute copies of “The Hall of Faith” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete the first section with a partner before discussing conclusions in small groups.

Write four headers on the board: *He Knew*, *He Didn’t Know*, *He Wanted to Know*, and *He Learned*. Divide learners into four groups and assign one header to each group. Have groups study [Hebrews 11:8](#), [17–18](#), and create two to three responses to each heading on the board. Have groups refer to [Genesis 12:1–9](#); [22:1–14](#) for more details.

Alternative 2. Have pairs complete the second part of the “The Hall of Faith” activity.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud [Hebrews 11:20–23](#). Say, “These verses depict an inheritance of faith passed down from generation to generation.” Divide learners into small groups and have each group discuss the following questions: 1—How was each person mentioned in these verses faithful to God? 2—What was the result of their faith?

Alternative 3. Have pairs complete “The Hall of Faith” exercise.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud [Hebrews 11:32](#), [39–40](#). Divide participants into six groups and assign the Scripture passage associated with their character: **Gideon Group** ([Judges 7](#)), **Barak Group** ([Judges 4](#)), **Samson Group** ([Judges 16](#)), **Jephthah Group** ([Judges 11](#)), **David Group** ([1 Samuel 17](#)), and **Samuel**

Group (1 [Samuel 15:10–16:13](#)). Give each group five minutes to read their assigned passage and give a summary of their group’s namesake to the whole class. Ask each group to answer the following question: “How did your character demonstrate faith and a lack of faith?”

Into Life

Write the following categories as headers on the board: *Thought*, *Behavior*, and *Speech*. Distribute an index card to each learner. Allow one minute for learners to reflect on the definition of *faith* from [Hebrews 11:1](#) and write one way they can each change something in each of the above categories to develop a life of deeper faith and be reminded of our stranger status in this world. End class with prayer.