

# CHARACTER MATTERS

Week Seven | February 17, 2019 | Faith: Revealing the Gospel with Our Beliefs

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's texts. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truth of this text and how it applies to your life.

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Faith is the assurance and conviction of things hoped for and things not seen.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

A life of faith demonstrates for us where we ultimately place our hope and what we really believe in.

### MEDITATE

*"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible." (Hebrews 11:1–3).*

## GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

We all want to be remembered for something. We all are known for something. There's something about everyone's identity that stands out and sets them apart from everyone else. In Hebrews 11, in what is known as the "Hall of Faith," the writer of Hebrews recounts the legacies of many people, some who were noteworthy leaders and some

who were just average, unremarkable individuals. But they are remembered and known because of their faith. How incredible to have faith as your legacy. He takes an entire chapter to remind his readers of these incredible Old Testament heroes and the extraordinary faith they demonstrated by believing and trusting in God. He pleads for his listeners to not shrink back, but to have faith and persevere. William Carey, the father of modern missions, once said, “Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God.” The men and women in the Hall of Faith expected and attempted great things because their faith had shaped and drastically changed their lives.

Faith is a crucial part of your character because all of your actions, whether consciously or unconsciously, are an extension of your beliefs. What you believe in your heart will be manifested and declared in your life. If you observe someone’s life long enough, you will inevitably begin to see what they believe in and what they trust.

Although faith is an intangible, perhaps nothing has a stronger influence on your character and how you live. What you believe and what you put your faith in aren’t determined by what you say, but only on how you live. This is the power of your character in relation to your faith. Over the long haul, your life and your character will eventually show where your faith lies.

🔗: *Would you characterize your faith as strong or weak?*

🔗: *What circumstances or situations impact your faith the most? What things increase your faith and what things decrease your faith?*

## 📌 UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

It is not the strength of your faith, but the object of your faith that saves you. This is an important point to remember and understand. You can have really strong faith in something that turns out to not provide any salvation or power. The heroes of the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11 are celebrated not just for having strong faith, but because of where and in whom their faith rested. In order to trust and believe in the unseen, our faith must have a strong object, a firm foundation. We must also die to our old nature each day and remember that our faith, as important as it is, isn’t what ultimately saves us.

### 1. WE WALK BY FAITH AND NOT SIGHT

### 2. WE’VE BEEN CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

### 3. WE'RE SAVED BY GRACE, THROUGH FAITH

### 4. WE NEED HELP WITH OUR UNBELIEF

#### GOING DEEPER

+ This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.

## WE WALK BY FAITH AND NOT SIGHT

### ■ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:7

**Q:** *Have you ever been somewhere so dark that you couldn't see anything? What was that experience like?*

**Q:** *What does it mean to walk with God? When Paul says "we walk by faith," what is he referring to? What does he mean?*

If you combine 2 Corinthians 5:7 with the definition of faith found in Hebrews 11:1, you end up with something like this—For we walk by the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen, not by sight. Our walk is based on and defined by those things that are unseen (2 Corinthians 4:18). Are you assured of the things you hope in? Do you have full confidence they will come true? And likewise, do you live in the full conviction that the things that aren't seen will still happen?

Living and walking by what isn't seen is pretty radical, but it is even more extreme in a cultural context like we live in, where sights and images surround us non-stop. It's hard not to walk by sight when all we do is see things all of the time. There is nothing wrong with seeing things, but to "walk" as a follower of Jesus is to be guided and directed and shaped by the unseen. Our character must be reflective of the unseen. How we choose to live, the values we hold, and the decisions we make are based on faith and the unknown, not what is seen and the known.

Q: *How do you walk by sight, and not by faith?*

Q: *Is your faith marked by assurance and conviction? In what areas do you need to grow in assurance and conviction in order to grow in your faith?*

## WE'VE BEEN CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

### ■ GALATIANS 2:20

Q: *What does it mean to be crucified with Christ?*

Q: *Jesus calls His disciples to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him [Matthew 16:24]. Does that characterize your life as a disciple?*

Living by faith means that you no longer live. “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me,” Paul writes (Galatians 2:20). Living by faith starts by dying daily. You must die daily to yourself, your wants, your needs, your desires, and your life in order to live for God.

Living by faith doesn't happen when you make Jesus the most important part of your life. It happens when you are willing to come to the end of yourself and submit to making Jesus your entire life. Faith in the gospel isn't inviting Jesus to have a place in your heart. It is inviting Jesus to take over your heart.

Saying you want to be crucified with Christ means you want your old self, your “flesh,” to die. Paul writes in Galatians that “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24). In order to bear fruit for God, you must die (John 12:24).

True life, according to the gospel, comes through death. It comes through the death of Jesus on the cross when He died to take away the sins of the world. And it comes when we die to ourselves and our desires. Jesus died so that we would die. Jesus rose again and lives eternally so that we would see that true life is found in living for Him. He came so that we would have life to the full (John 10:10).

Q: *What parts of your life and your flesh have not yet been fully put to death?*

Q: *How have you experienced what it looks like for Christ to live in you? How is walking by faith easier when you remember that Christ is in you?*

## WE'RE SAVED BY GRACE, THROUGH FAITH

### ■ EPHESIANS 2:8-9

Q: *How are you saved, according to Ephesians 2:8-9?*

Q: *What is the avenue by which you are saved?*

You cannot be saved without faith. “Without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). Faith is necessary to experience salvation.

Additionally, you cannot be saved without grace. Grace is God giving us what we do not deserve. The acrostic, “GRACE – God’s Riches at Christ’s Expense,” can be helpful in remembering what grace is. Grace is necessary in order to experience salvation. We do not deserve forgiveness or eternal life because our sin has separated us from God. But God gives us those things anyway because He is gracious. He gives us things we do not deserve. This is why Paul refers to it as a gift. Grace is free. Grace is undeserved. Grace is generous.

Grace and faith are both necessary for salvation, but it is important to understand the relationship and connection between the two—how they are different and also how they work together. We are saved by grace, through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). Grace saves us. We are saved as a result of a gift from God. Only God’s gift of grace can save us from our sins and the penalty they require.

Grace is unmerited, undeserved favor from a sovereign and loving God whereby He applies the work of redemption (“to buy back”) from the slavery of sin without consideration of any inborn merit, works, or

contribution of the sinner. God by grace alone secures salvation.

Faith is trust in Jesus Christ alone as a living person for forgiveness of our sins and for eternal life with God. It is believing what the Bible tells us about Jesus, that He took our guilt upon Himself and paid the penalty to purchase a place for us in God's family and in heaven. It is putting our salvation completely in His hands alone!

Salvation is the gift of grace from God, not a result of works by us. Notice that whether referring to faith or salvation in general (of which faith is a part) the Scripture says, "*this* is not your own doing", we can be certain that, the *this* "is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8–9). So, we could say that our faith itself is a gift from God. Scripture everywhere teaches what Jonah declares in his prayer, "Salvation is from the LORD" (Jonah 2:9c).

❓: *Which is harder for you to understand and grasp, the "by grace" aspect of salvation or the "through faith" aspect?*

❓: *How do you believe [consciously or unconsciously] that salvation is more about your faith than about God's grace? How does this make you think you can earn salvation instead of remembering it is a gift?*

## WE NEED HELP WITH OUR UNBELIEF

### ❑ MARK 9:23–24

❓: *How can the father in Mark 9:23–24 say he believes and that he needs help with his unbelief at the same time?*

❓: *What things cause you to unbelieve? What causes you to lose faith?*

The relationship between grace and faith can be complex. Grace is steady and constant. It is reliable. It doesn't waver. It isn't impacted by circumstances. God is gracious. His grace never ends. It never falters. Faith for living the Christian life, on the other hand, is unreliable. It comes and goes. It wavers, gets shaken. Faith changes. You can have complete faith and trust in something at one moment, but days or hours later it can seem like you have lost all faith.

Paul tells young Timothy at the end of his letter to him that he (Paul) has kept the faith (2 Timothy 4:7). That's the goal. To keep the faith. How do you keep the faith when your faith is unreliable and easily altered? You do it by begging and pleading with God to help your unbelief as you live the Christian life.

One of the realities of life is that our faith will always be partial. We will never have complete and total faith. We can walk in assurance and conviction, but it will never be complete. Not yet, at least. We see things dimly now. One day, we will see things fully and clearly and completely (1 Corinthians 13:12).

It is important to remember, however, that we are saved according to the object of our faith, not the strength of our faith. This is why Jesus tells His disciples that if they had faith as small as a mustard seed they could move mountains (Matthew 17:20). Jesus says nothing is impossible if you have faith even that small. You don't need great faith in order to accomplish great things for God. You need a great Savior who has given you great grace.

We pray for our faith to grow, but that doesn't mean that we lose all faith. With people who have a little faith that trusts in His extraordinary grace, Jesus can set the world on fire. Our faith is fragile. Our walks are clouded by sight all the time. Our faith must be strengthened. It cannot be taken for granted. Oh, God, would You sustain our faith and grant us faith to trust and believe in You when our faith fails!

**Q:** *How do you react when you see what God can do with such small amounts of faith? What does that make you think about your own amount of faith?*

**Q:** *Hebrews 11 lists a cloud of witnesses and faith experts to encourage us in our faith. Who in your life has kept the faith, walked with God, and could encourage you in your unbelief? Who are your older/wiser witnesses?*

## NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

- 🔗 *What is the hardest thing about faith and its aspects and nature for you personally?*
- 🔗 *How can you change the things your eyes see and consume to help you remember that you are to walk by the unseen rather than the seen? If the things we see impact and cloud our faith, how can removing or eliminating those things help our faith grow?*
- 🔗 *How does a deep and fully assured faith impact your character in a tangible and practical way? How does a strong faith lead to a healthy and holy life?*

## PRAY

+ *Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

Our most gracious heavenly Father:

- *Would You help my unbelief! God, my faith is so prone to waver and falter. Give me faith to believe, faith to persevere, faith to fight the good fight.*
- *Help me walk by faith and not by sight. Help me to fix my eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.*
- *By the power of the Holy Spirit, help me to deny myself and die daily to my flesh and my desires. May Christ live in me and be glorified in me.*
- *You are what saves. It is not by faith or its amount or degree that saves me. It is You, the object of my faith. It is Your grace that has changed and saved me. May my faith increase as I remember that my salvation is dependent on Your finished work on the cross and not on my wavering faith.*