

St. Matthew AME Church
Orange, New Jersey
Rev. Melvin E. Wilson, Pastor/Teacher

Women's Bible Study
Saturday, March 8, 2025

Spring Series: "A Living Faith"

"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

Hebrews 11:1

Session I: "We Are Not The First"

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."

Hebrews 12:1

- Scripture Background-The book of Hebrews is a masterful document written to Jews who were evaluating Jesus or struggling with the new faith. The message of Hebrews is that Jesus is better. Christianity is superior and completely sufficient for salvation.
 - The authorship of the book of Hebrews is uncertain. Several names have been suggested; including Paul, Luke, Barnabas, Apollos, Silas, Philip, Priscilla and others because the name of the author is not given. Most scholars do not believe that Paul was the author, because the writing style of Hebrews is quite different from that of his letters. In addition, Paul identified himself in his other letters and appealed to his authority as an apostle, whereas this writer of Hebrews, who never gives his name; appeals to eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry for authority. Nevertheless, the author of Hebrews knew Paul well. Hebrews was probably written by one of Paul's close associates who often heard him preach. Hebrews is often called the "Faith Chapter".
- Different Translations and Versions of Hebrews 11:1
 - New International Version
 - "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."

- English Standard Version
 - “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”
- Message Bible (1-2)
 - “The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It’s our handle on what we can’t see. The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd.”
- King James Version
 - “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

- New Living Translation
 - “Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see.”
- Revised Standard Version
 - “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”
- Amplified
 - “Now faith is the assurance (title deed, confirmation) of things hoped for (divinely guaranteed), and the evidence of things not seen [the conviction of their reality—faith comprehends as fact what cannot be experienced by the physical senses].”
- Two Important Points
 - Two words describe faith: sure and certain. These two qualities need a secure beginning and ending point. The beginning point of faith is believing in God’s character - He is who He says. The end point is believing in God’s promises He will do what He says. When we believe that God will fulfill His promises even though we don't see those promises materializing yet, we demonstrate true faith.
 - Hebrews 11:1-2 - The writer of Hebrews defines faith as the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen. To exercise faith is to have confidence about an expectation without visible proof that it will happen. What makes this confidence possible? The trustworthiness of the object of faith. Faith is saying that God is telling the truth. Faith is saying I trust Him.
 - If you want to increase your faith, grow in your understanding of God. Believers of the past trusted Him by faith and won God’s approval.
 - Believing that God exists is only the beginning even the demons believe that much.
 - “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that and shudder. You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless.” (James 2:19-20 NIV)

- God will not settle for mere acknowledgement of His existence. He wants a personal dynamic relationship with us that will transform our lives. Those who seek God will find that they are rewarded with his intimate presence.
 - “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him, must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.” (Hebrews 11:6 NIV)

The Beginning Point, God’s Character

Character - The combination of qualities or features that distinguishes one person, group, or thing from another. (The American Heritage Dictionary)

- God is Good and Compassionate - “The Lord is good to all; He has compassion on all He has made.” (Psalm 145:9)
- God is Loving - “And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love, whoever lives in love, lives in God, and God in him.” (I John 4:16)
- God is Just - “He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all His ways are just.” (Deuteronomy 32:4)
- God is Gracious - “For if ye turn again unto the Lord, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him.” (II Chronicles 30:9 KJV)
- God is Kind - “Because thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee,” (Psalm 63:3 KJV)
- God is Faithful and Forgiving - “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (I John 1:9 KJV)
- God is Holy - “Who is like You, O Lord among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (Exodus 15:11 KJV)
- God is Wise - “to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.” (Romans 16:27 NIV)
- God is Patient - “The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (II Peter 3:9)
- God is sheer Mercy and Grace; not easily angered, He’s rich in love.” (Psalm 103:8 MSG)
- God is Helpful - “For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, ‘Fear not, I will help you.’” (Isaiah 41:13 NKJV)

God Is Also...

- Self-Sufficient - God is totally and absolutely complete within Himself. Nothing can be added or taken away from God. God is sufficient by virtue of His creation, His independence, and our dependence.
 - “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.” (Colossians 2:9-10 NIV)
- Sovereign - Everything that happens comes about because God either directly causes it or consciously allows it.
 - “I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, ‘My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.’” (Isaiah 46:10 NIV)
- Omniscient - God knows everything and anything, and He knows it comprehensively. Nothing can be hidden from God.
 - “O Lord, You have searched me and known *me*.” (Psalm 139:1 NKJV)
- Omnipotent - God’s power knows no limits.
 - “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.” (Isaiah 40:28 KJV)
- Omnipresent - God encompasses everything, so that whatever you do, wherever you are, God is right there and all of Him is there. God is there when you feel Him and when you don’t feel Him.
 - “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?” (Psalm 139:7 NKJV)

The End Point of Faith

The end point is believing in God’s promises - He will do what He says. When we believe that God will fulfill His promises even though we don’t see those promises even though we don’t see those promises materializing yet, we demonstrate true faith.

- “God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” (Numbers 23:19 NIV)
- “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.” (Hebrews 10:23 NIV)
- Peace - God’s peace is different from the world’s peace. True peace is not found in positive thinking, in absence of conflict, or in good feelings. It comes from knowing God is in control.
 - “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. **7** And the peace of God, which transcends all

understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7 NIV)

- Protection - God will protect us all the time and everywhere.
 - “But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.” (II Thessalonians 3:3)
- Provision - Our faith teaches us to trust God for our provisions. We may not get all that we want, but we have the assurance our God will supply every need.
 - “And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19 NIV)
- Power - The Holy Spirit is the very presence of God within us. If we want to experience God’s power and discover ourselves that He is able, we must be humble and willing to submit to God.
 - “I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms. Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come.” (Ephesians 1:19-21 NLT)
- Presence - Each little piece of the universe has the entire presence of God. God is spirit; therefore, he exists everywhere at the same time. God is with us, when we feel Him and when we don’t feel Him.
 - “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?” (Psalm 139:7)
- Purpose - We were made by God and for God - and until we understand that life will never make sense. It is only in God that we discover our identity, our meaning, our purpose, our significance, and our destiny.
 - “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10 NIV)

The Hall of Faith

“This is what the ancients were commended for.” Hebrews 11:2

- Hebrews 11 is home of the “Hall of Faith”. The champions of the Old Testament are recognized for their achievements as they followed God by faith. Success for them didn’t bypass suffering. Instead, they trusted God and ran the race to the end. To encourage us (the readers) to keep going, the authors of Hebrews remind them that they’re not the first to travel the faith road. Others have encountered the hardships of the race and crossed the finish line.
- In the following “Hall of Faith” the author uses a repeated structure: he gives the name of an Old Testament believer, explains what he or she did, and uses the expression “by faith” to connect that person’s actions with a belief system. This pattern is a reminder that faith is measured by the steps of one’s feet - not by his feelings.

- A Living Faith makes a difference. Make sure your faith is more than just a statement - it should also result in action (page 11)
- Abraham's life was filled with faith, at God's command he left home and went to another land - obeying without question.
 - "The Lord said to Abram, leave your country, your people, and your father's household and go to the land, I will show you." (Genesis 12:1)
- Abraham believed the covenant that God made with him. (Genesis 12:2; 3; 13:14-16; 15:1-6)
- In obedience to God, Abraham was even willing to sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22:1-19)
- These people of faith died without receiving all that God had promised, but they never lost their vision of heaven ("a better place").
- Many Christians become frustrated and defeated because their needs, wants, expectations, and demands are not immediately met when they believe in Christ. They become impatient and want to quit.

April Bible Study

"Walk It, Don't Just Talk It"