

Pastor's Note

Hello

Over the next several weeks we're going to look how faith makes a difference when you're going through tough times in life. We're going to start with an overview. We'll go into more detail as the series progresses. But first let's look at why it's important to have faith. Look at Hebrews 11:6 *"Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him."* Now it says there that without faith, it is impossible to please God. That tells you how important having faith is. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. You see the Christian life is really pretty simple. Sum it up in two words: love and faith. Love God with all your heart. Love your neighbor as yourself. And have faith. That's it. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. So you can see the importance of having faith.

What is faith? Well it can't be described in just one sentence. Faith is like a diamond. It's multifaceted. It has lots of aspects to it. In fact, this week, I want to give you six facets from Hebrews 11, the classic chapter of the bible on faith. Here they are; number one, the bible says that faith is believing when we don't see it. Number two, faith is obeying when we don't understand it. Number three, faith is giving when we don't have it. Number four, faith is persisting when we don't feel like it. Number five, faith is thanking God before we receive from God. And number six, faith is trusting God when we don't get what we ask for.

Number one, faith is believing when we don't see it. Hebrews 11:1 *"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."* It sounds like a contradiction, but the Bible teaches that faith is visualizing the future in the present. It's being sure of what you don't see. It is seeing it in advance. Man says: "Seeing is believing." God says the opposite. He says: "Believing is seeing." And some things in life, you have to believe them before you can see them. In 1960, JFK stood up and said: "Let's put a man on the moon by the end of the decade." When he said that, the technology had not even been invented to put a man on the moon. But some things have to be believed before you can see them. You've got to believe it in advance. Everything that's happened in life was an impossibility before it became a reality and somebody had to believe it. Faith is simply trusting God to turn dreams into reality. Because nothing happens 'til somebody believes it's possible.

Number two, faith is obeying when we don't understand it, Hebrews 11:8 (GN) *"It was faith that made Abraham obey when God called him and go out to a country God had promised to him. He left his own country without knowing where he was going."* Now, you know this story. Abraham is living in the city of the Ur in what is now southern Iraq. He's seventy-five years old God says, "I'm going to send you to a new country." Abraham says, "Whaaaat? Your going to build a great nation out of me?" God says, "Yeah." Abraham says, "How will I know when I get there?" God says, "I'll tell you." Would you go? Faith is obeying when you don't understand it. And at seventy-five years of age, Abraham starts out on the greatest journey of his life and becomes the father of a nation.

That's what it means. To obey when you don't see it. Obeying when you don't understand it. It doesn't make any sense but God says, "Do it." Now, there are a lot of people who want a guarantee of success before they try anything, but God says, "No." Because faith always involves risks. He wants to force you to trust Him. By the way, you know what one of the greatest tests of your faith is? Forgiveness. It never seems like the right thing to do but it's always the right thing to do. And I don't feel like doing it and it doesn't seem right, but I'm going to obey even though I don't understand it. So I forgive that person. As a kid, did your parents ever tell you to do something you didn't want to do, that didn't make any sense. Then later, with 20-20 hindsight, you said, "Oh, that was pretty wise." That's the way God is with us. Faith is doing the right thing even when it seems absurd. Now, one of the tests of faith is how quickly do you obey God when He tells you to do something? Proverbs 3:5 (NIV) says, *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."* Faith is believing when we don't see it and faith is believing when we don't understand it.

Number three, faith is giving when we don't have it. Did you know that? Faith is giving when we don't have it to give. Giving and faith go together. In fact, God uses finances to test us all the time. Have you ever had to make a decision whether to pay a bill, or tithe? This is a test. God's testing you to see how much you trust Him. How much you believe. There are two ways that you can give. You can give by faith, or you can give by fear. Giving by fear is when you say, "How much can I afford to give?" Giving by faith is when you say, "How much does God want me to give?" whether I've got it to give or not. That's what it means to give in faith. Look at Hebrews 11:4b *"...by faith (Abel) was commended as a righteous man when God spoke well of his offering..."* He gave in faith. 2 Corinthians 8:2-3

says, *"Out of... extreme poverty welled up rich generosity... They gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability."*

Now it's one thing to give when you've got it to spare. It's another thing to give when you don't know where the money's going to come from to pay your bills. That is a test of faith. Giving when you don't have it. I'll never forget when I was in seminary and we were staring at a \$2730.00 stack of bills and with what little money we had, the only check we wrote was our tithe check. We said, "Okay, we're going to trust that God has called us to this path." That was a step of faith. In fact, one of the greatest lessons I've ever learned. Because as I look back on it now, not only did we receive a check in the mail the very next day for \$2725.00, but God blessed us with knowing that money is never going to be an issue. We live in the confidence that God absolutely will provide. That in itself is priceless. And God continues to bless us so much. If you're not trusting God in your finances, you're just hurting yourself, not just financially but in peace of mind.

Number four, faith is persisting when we don't feel like it. Now, you know our culture says, "Base everything you do on how you feel." In other words, if you feel like doing it, do it. If you don't feel like doing it, don't do it. That's a guaranteed formula for immaturity. Because immature people build their lives on feelings rather than on commitments. What happens when you live your life based on how you feel? You end up being manipulated by moods. You flip-flop from day to day because you feel different from day to day. One of the marks of maturity is when you live your life by commitments rather than by feelings. The truth is, we don't always feel like doing what's right. Do we? We don't always feel like being nice. I don't always feel like coming to church on Sunday. But the issue is not what do you feel, but do you do the right thing? Let me give you a definition of success. You want to know how to be a success? Successful people do what most people don't feel like doing. That's it. That's how you become a success. Successful people simply develop habits that unsuccessful people don't feel like developing.

Like using your time wisely, being persistent, and sharpening your skills. Most people say, "Well, I don't feel like doing it." You know, we could bring in Kristie Yamaguchi, who won the gold medal for figure skating in the Olympics and say, "Now, Kristie, how many days in the last five years did you really feel like getting up and practicing on the ice for six hours a day?" Probably not very many. Because you don't get to the Olympics by doing what you feel like doing. Faith is persisting when you don't feel like it. You don't become a master musician by practicing only when you feel like it.

Master musicians practice in spite of their feelings. Super salesmen don't just make calls when they're in the mood. "Oh, I don't feel like I'm in the mood today. I think I'll stay home and watch Netflix." You're not going to be a super salesman. And godly men and godly women don't get that way just by feeling it. They develop some habits in their lives, some disciplines like having a daily time with God, and they do it whether they feel like it or not. And that pleases God.

You say, "You mean even if I don't feel like doing it, spending time with God, pleases Him?" Yes. Why? Because you're doing it in faith and faith, which pleases God, is believing when you don't see it, and obeying when you don't understand it, and giving when you don't have it, and persisting when you don't feel like it. That's what it means to have faith. Faith is being persistent. It's refusing to give up, no matter how tired you get. How do you develop persistence? Well, look at this verse, Hebrews 11:27 (JB) *"It was by faith that Moses left Egypt and was not afraid of the King's anger. He held to his purpose like a man who could see the invisible."* What made him persistent? It's that last phrase. He saw Him who's invisible. We can only accomplish the impossible when we see the invisible. It says Moses had his eye on God. This is the key to persistence. Keep your eye on God, not on your problem. You look at your problem, you're going to be stressed. You've got to look around the problem, over the problem, under the problem, sideways, through the problem, whatever, so that you see God. Because if you look at God, He'll give you the power to keep on keeping on.

God says, "I will give you the strength to persevere if you keep your eyes on Me." Look at Him who is invisible. That's God. And God gives you the strength to keep on working on your marriage when you want to say, "It isn't worth it. This is just too hard. It's too much effort. It's easier to just check out." No, it's not. Because the payoff, or the fallout, is enormous. And God says, "I'll give you the persistence to keep on working on that marriage. I'll give you the persistence to keep on trying to make that business go when it's about to go bankrupt." You keep on keeping on. Because faith is persisting even when I don't feel like it.

Number five, faith is thanking God before we receive it. A good example of this is Joshua. Hebrews 11:30 says, *"By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days."* Moses led the Israelites out across the wilderness, out of Egypt, over to the promised land. What's the first thing that happens? They come up to the most fortified city in the world: Jericho. Enormous walls. Now here are people who've been slaves for four hundred years. They're not a

trained army. They have no weapons. And here is the most fortified city in the world. And God says, "Okay, guys. Here's my plan: I want you to walk around this city, once a day, for six days. Just march around it in silence. And then, on the seventh day, I want you to march around it seven times. And I want you to be thanking Me in advance, all during this time. Trust Me. This is going to be a statement of faith, by your marching around, because you expect Me to work." I'm sure they must have felt pretty silly. Here's this seventh time they're marching around, they're probably singing a song, "Oh, we're marching around this thing and it's gonna fall. It's going to be so great. We're going to overcome this city and we're all going to make it into the Bible." And they're just marching around, "And we'll be famous and they'll be talking about us at Macedonia Christian Church in a few thousand years." I don't think they said that part. And they're marching around, you know, and the walls came tumbling down. And they had victory.

What were they doing? They were thanking God in advance. That's what faith is. You see, faith is not believing God can do it. It's believing God will do it. You got a problem in your life and you think God can solve it, that's not faith. Faith isn't believing God can do it. God can do it whether you believe it or not. His ability is not dependent upon your faith. Faith isn't even believing he will do it. That's hope. "I hope He will. I hope He'll answer my prayer. I hope He'll save my marriage. I hope He'll get me a job. I hope He'll find me a marriage partner. I hope I'll get well." That's hope. Faith is thanking God in advance. It's believing that God is already doing it. In the present. That the answer is already on its way. Look at Mark 11:24 (GN) "*When you pray and ask for something, believe that you have received it and you will be given what you ask for.*" Notice the past tense, "...believe that you have received it..." That's what faith is. Notice, it does not say here, "when you pray and ask for something, beg and beg and beg and cry and pout and then, maybe God will think about it." No, it says believe you've already received it. If you waited until you received the answer, to thank God, is that faith? No. That's just gratitude. "Thanks, God." It's thanking God in advance.

In 2 Chronicles, chapter 20, there's a great story where the Israelites were going to go out and fight three enemy armies. They were outnumbered three to one. And God says, "Here's the battle plan. I want you to build a choir and put the choir in front of the Israeli army as you march into battle." They said, "Huh?" Yeah, put these guys up here with tambourines and stuff. No weapons. Well, it says that as they did that, this so confused the enemy, the enemies started fighting among themselves and gave the Israelites a tremendous victory. What was the point? There

was a principle there. The choir before the army: You praise God before it happens. That was the point. Thanking God in advance. I'm simply saying that if God tells you to go after Moby Dick in a rowboat, you'd better take along the tartar sauce. Get it? Good! Thank Him in advance. Prepare for what God is going to do.

Number six, faith is trusting even if we don't get it. Now, let me give you two facts about prayer. Number one, God always hears every prayer and answers every prayer. Always. God always hears and answers every prayer. Fact number two, He does not always answer the way we want Him to answer. Have you found that to be true? Sometimes His answer is, "You've got to be kidding!" or "No way!" or "Uh-uh." or "Not yet" or "Later" or "Wait a while." God answers in many, many different ways. And, sometimes, God says no. Why? Because He doesn't love you? NO! Because he does love you. God is not a vending machine you put in a prayer and get out whatever you want. Because a vending machine will give you stuff that'll kill you. But God will only give you what's for your benefit.

Living by faith does not exempt you from problems. Did you know that as a Christian, you still have the same problems you had before you became a believer? A Christian has the exact same problems a non-believer has, it's just now you have a new power to help you with them. To help you cope and handle the stress and deal with it. God doesn't say you won't have any problems. Faith doesn't exempt you from problems. Only in America do you have this health and wealth gospel thing that says if I become a believer, God wants me to become a millionaire and always be healthy and no problems. That's just not true. You know it's not true. And God never made that promise. And sometimes we pray for relief and relief doesn't come.

In fact, sometimes, we pray for God to remove a difficulty, or a problem, and instead of taking it away, He gives you the strength to go through it. Now, why does He do that? Because God is more interested in your character than He is in your comfort. God didn't say, "I've come that you might have comfort." God wants to build character. He wants to make you a person of integrity and stability and values. His character. Christ-likeness. And the only way you get character is by going through tough times. And if you didn't have problems, how would you know God could bail you out? You wouldn't know how to trust God. You don't know God is all you need until He's all you've got. That's when you have to depend on Him. Look at Hebrews 11:39-40 *"They were all commended for their faith yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned*

something better..." We're talking about heroes of the faith here. These people had promises and dreams, and they didn't come true, and they're still heroes of the faith? Yes. Because they trusted even when they didn't get it. Anybody can trust God when things are going great. But real faith develops in the valleys of life when the dream is delayed.

You know what I've discovered. I've found that if you could understand everything about God, and understand why He answers the way He does, when it doesn't make sense to you, if He were small enough for you to understand, He wouldn't be big enough for your problems. If you could understand everything about God, He wouldn't be God. He'd just be human. The very hurts and pains that we pray for relief from are the very hurts and pains that cause the eventual greatest blessings in our lives. They build character in our lives. The very things that we want most desperately to be removed, so we'll be comfortable, are the very things that shape us to be who He wants us to be.

The Bible says, that without faith, it is impossible to please God. Faith is not just intellectual assent. You know, "I believe in God." Big deal. The Bible says the devil believes in God too. Demons tremble, but you're not going to find them in heaven. Why? Because it's more than intellectual assent. Faith, get this, is a lifestyle. What is it? It's a lifestyle that believes when we don't see it, obeys when we don't understand it, gives when we don't have it, persists when we don't feel like it, thanks God before we receive it, and trusts God even if we don't get it. That's what it means to live by faith.

Maybe you're facing a full-time problem on part-time faith and let me tell you, that won't work. It just won't work. You need a full-time, head-on, full-born faith to handle the problems you're going to have in this life. The starting point is to establish a relationship with Jesus Christ. I can't think of a better time to do so than right now. If you've never said yes to Christ, just say, "Jesus, I want to step over the line. I want to put my faith in You. I don't see You, but I want to believe in You." Be like the Father in Mark 9:24 (NCV) who cried out, "*I do believe! Help me to believe more!*" That's faith. That pleases God. I cannot encourage you enough to do it today.

Blessings,

Scott

