

Warm-up

Consider Rom. 8:24-25 as we begin today's study.

"For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it."

- ▶ Exercising faith sustains me in all seasons.

Seeing Is Believing (vs. 13a)

"All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance....." (v. 13)

Do you believe that "seeing is believing" is an ironclad statement? Can something exist that you cannot see; is faith one of these things (see Heb. 11:1)? I've been thinking about this, and have concluded that when my confidence in something is rooted in my experience, I no longer need new evidence to believe it.

Faithful men and women consider God's promises unalterable. They remember His past faithfulness and thank Him for today and tomorrow. They refuse to believe that today's challenges are problems, but rather have confidence in God's control. It is O.K. with them for Him to govern the timing of things they are concerned with (see Ps. 138:8, *"The Lord will accomplish what concerns me...."*).

Have you seen Jesus? How do you know that He is real and is working in your life?

"and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8)

This verse provides us with a clue to believing what we have not seen. It is to "greatly rejoice" because you believe God's promises. When He says, *"Do not fear because I am with you"* (Isa. 41:10), we can thank Him for "no fear". When He says, "I will provide for all your needs" (Phil. 4:19) we can be assured he will do that, and thank Him now.

- ▶ *I relate to the father's response to Jesus in Mark 9:24, "I do believe; help my unbelief."*

Deferred Reward (vs. 13b-16)

"...and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth." (v. 13b)

Who said that we'd be in sync with this world and its system, its values? We will not be. God made us for heaven, not for this world (see John 14:3). We live here, but our focus is on His kingdom (Matt. 6:33).

God has the right to the timing of everything that happens in our lives. His promises are always kept, even when it seems like He "forgot" or changed His mind! His faithfulness does not depend on ours (see 2 Tim. 2:13). The previous verses in Hebrews 11 refer to Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah, saying that they *"died in faith, without receiving the promises"*. God chose to "defer the full reward" of their faith until heaven. I believe that God gives enough encouragement and "reward" each week to sustain us. He provides enough evidence in our lives from the past to convince us to believe Him. He invites us to trust Him.

By the way, when God makes His direction clear, don't look back (see verse 15). Returning to "the way things were" may be tempting, but is not profitable.

- ▶ *When a godly, faithful servant of the Lord dies, God's reward of their faith is released. And the effect of their life is multiplied.*

Faith On the Line (vs. 17-19)

"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son" (v. 17)

Paul writes in 2 Tim. 3:12, *"All who desire to godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."* Not if, but when! I bet Abraham was not surprised that he was tested. Verse 19 gives us the clue that he was ready, saying, *"He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead..."* When your attitude and belief is that nothing is impossible with God (Matt. 19:26) you enter a trial in good shape, able to bear up under the strain and to keep thinking clearly.

David stated in Psalm 7:9b, *“For the righteous God tries the hearts and minds”*. The word “minds” refers to the kidneys or “inner man”. God likes to see what is really going on inside our head. 1 John 3:21 puts it this way, *“if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God”*. It is normal to feel the pressure to relent and not trust God, or to complain. Jesus knows this, and gave us this encouragement:

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; ³² but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail...” (Luke 21:31-32)

Has God ever asked you to do something ridiculous, or not do something that seemed perfect? More than once I've scratched my head and asked, “Really, Lord?” I think that the important thing is to make sure of the voice you're hearing. I'm very good at speaking to myself in perfect rationale, even misapplying scripture to support my viewpoint or the choice I want to make! But it takes both faith and focus to do things God's way when they don't make sense humanly. As I type these words I'm being tested with my company, unable to see how tomorrow will unfold. I have to exercise disciplined, faithful, Christ-centered focus to not be steered off course. What about you? Is your faith on the line these days?

► *Anything that you release to God with His prompting will receive His blessing!*

Faith for the Future (vs. 20-22)

“By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.” (v. 21)

You can make a good case for the powerful downstream effect of the life of a faithful follower of Christ.

“Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments”. (Dt. 7:9)

“You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, ⁶ but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments”. (Ex. 20:5-6)

How do you feel about a person with strong faith “standing in the gap” for a person with weak faith? Ezekiel 22:30 includes that phrase, but in the context of God looking for someone who would not pollute the nation by turning away from God's standards. Someone who would stay faithful to the Lord and uphold His ways. I believe that the strong faith of a believer today has an impact on those around him, starting with his family.

► *The greatest investment a man or woman can make is to plant the seeds of faith in their descendants.*

Faith Without Compromise (vs. 23-25)

“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter” (v. 14)

I've always liked the way this principle is expressed in 1 Cor. 15:58, *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”* Compare the following two verses in this regard:

“Like a trampled spring and a polluted well is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked.” (Prov. 25:26)

“I have set the LORD continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.” (Ps. 16:8)

What are you holding on to; what can you not release? The “heroes of the faith” in this chapter simply did not let go of trusting God and walking by faith verses by sight. What are you *refusing* (v. 24) and what are you *choosing* (v. 25). Moses refused the “passing pleasures of sin” in order to please God and be blessed. Can you resist the bribe of the enemy which “corrupts the heart” (Ecc. 7:7)?

► *Uncompromising faith has the effect of drawing others closer to God and inviting God's blessings in your life.*

Group Discussion

1. How are you doing with “hoping for what you do not see”? What helps you to trust God for tomorrow? (v. 13)
2. Share about a person in your life from another generation who contributed to your faith in God. (vs. 20-22)
3. What conditions do you place on “stepping out in faith”? (All verses)

NEXT TIME: Lesson 10: FAITH / Growth – Hebrews 11:26-40