

THE LOOKOUT

NOVEMBER 2021

Unit: HEBREWS (Part 3)
Theme: FAITH

Overview: If Jesus is superior to everyone and everything (September lessons), and if he is the ultimate high priest who can connect us to God (October lessons), then our best response is to place all our faith in him. *Faith*, Bible writers testify, is appropriating God’s grace for our lives. During this unit, students will learn how to hold firm in their faith, grow up in faith, persevere in faith, and be known among the faithful.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a lesson aim, lesson text, and supplemental text.

Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: Study, Application, and Discovery.

Use the Discovery questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 28, 2021

LESSON AIM: **Determine to put your
faith into action.**

UNIT: Hebrews (Part 3)

THEME: Faith

LESSON TEXT: Hebrews 11:1-6, 30-40; 12:1-3

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Hebrews 11:7-29

JOIN THE RANKS OF THE FAITHFUL

BY MARK SCOTT

Sports figures look to former great athletes (like Michael Jordan) for inspiration. Doctors look to former medical personnel (like Alexander Fleming, who discovered penicillin) to build on their discoveries. Inventors look to former inventors (like Thomas Edison) for motivation to keep trying. Christians look to their faithful forebears to receive what has been promised by God.

The writer of Hebrews encouraged readers not to give up, to look to faithful examples, and to consider Jesus. Therein we can join the ranks of the faithful. Twila Paris sings, “Come and join the reapers, all the kingdom seekers . . . for the Lord is calling faithful men.”

The Faithful Understand Faith’s Description and Importance

Hebrews 11:1-6

Many people use Hebrews 11:1 as a definition for *faith*. After all, the word “*is*” is in the verse. But what kind of “*is*” is it? The word *faith* does not mean *confidence* (that which undergirds) and *assurance* (refutes adversaries). Perhaps the “*is*” is more descriptive than definitive. What follows in the chapter are certainly not definitions as much as examples. These examples are from the *ancients* (elders). They were *commended* (the Greek word is *martureō*, and it appears several times in this text).

One event and two people were immediately mentioned. The event was creation. The *universe* (age) was made by particles that cannot be seen. Faith is necessary to appreciate that. The two *ancients* were Abel (in contrast with Cain) and Enoch. Abel’s offering was *better* and spoken well of by God—evidently because it was offered in faith. Enoch walked with God and did not experience death (Genesis 4–5). Others mentioned in our lesson text include Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob/Esau, the sons of Joseph, Moses, and the people of the Exodus.

The importance of faith is seen in Hebrews 11:6. Faith pleases God. The one who has it will believe that *he* exists and that *he* rewards people who search for him.

The Faithful Are Commended for Looking Forward

Hebrews 11:30-40

The writer’s list of the faithful continues. Some surprises are on the list. We learn of the people of the

conquest (Joshua’s era). We learn of the judges—Gideon (who started well but ended with some arrogance), Barak (who needed lots of help from Deborah), Samson (who was something of a playboy but judged Israel for 20 years and must have done some good things), Jephthah (who was presumptuous with a vow), David, Samuel, and the prophets.

The commended are reviewed with what we might call “compressed narratives.” They *conquered kingdoms, administered (worked) justice, . . . shut the mouths of lions* (Daniel 6), *quenched the fury of the flames* (Daniel 3), *escaped the edge of the sword . . . and routed foreign armies*. They were all examples of God turning weakness to strength.

The writer mentioned the good things the commended did as well as the things they endured. They endured death (some were raised from the dead—1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:18-37); they endured torture (as in the tightening of drum strings); they endured jeering, floggings, chains, prison, stoning, martyrdom, and many other heinous things. Indeed, *the world was not worthy of them*. But they were commended for their faith because they looked beyond the present. The implied message for the Hebrews was this: *Why would you go back when you have what the ancients could only hope for?*

The Faithful One

Hebrews 12:1-3

As the Epistle moved into the final applications, the writer offered one more look at Jesus. The supreme example of walking by faith was Jesus himself. The Hebrews should fix their *eyes on* him. He is the *pioneer* (Hebrews 2:10) and *perfecter* of faith.

Just like the faithful before him, Jesus endured much (like the cross). In fact, he scorned (to think down) *its shame*. Jesus endured tons of flack, but he never lost heart.

Believers have cheerleaders from the past (a *great cloud of witnesses*—maybe the people mentioned in Hebrews 11) and a glorious Savior in the present. So, like a runner getting ready to run a race, the believer throws off anything that hinders—these could be good things or bad things. Today is the first Sunday of Advent. Put faith into action by looking to the Bethlehem baby. ■

APPLICATION

BE A FAITHFUL SERVANT

BY DAVID FAUST

Years ago, while leading a new church in New York, I gave the congregation a little survey. Among other questions, I asked those mostly new believers what the word *minister* means. Their most common answers were “preacher” and “teacher.” Others wrote “shepherd,” “leader,” and “counselor.” One respondent, I assume a child, wrote “dentist.” I laughed at that one, but there might be some truth in it. Sometimes ministry is like pulling teeth!

Unfortunately, no one answered with the most biblical definition: “servant.” Ministry is every Christian’s responsibility. “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10). The apostle Paul called his friend Tychicus “a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord” (Colossians 4:7). Reader friend, I exhort you to be a faithful servant, too.

Be faithful to the Lord. Guard your character and your state of mind. Don’t compromise your integrity, even in small matters. Remember who you are and whose you are. Above all, follow Jesus.

Be faithful to Scripture. God’s Word is a lamp to your feet. Don’t let Satan dim the light. If the Lord trusts you to lead others, they need to be loved, taught, and challenged, not just pacified and entertained. Resist the pressure to focus on fun and games or the latest social issue. Stay anchored in the book that is “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16). When you feel exhausted, catch your breath by inhaling the oxygen of God’s inspired Word. Believe it with all your heart. Do your best to live it and pass it along.

Be faithful to your family. Your spouse, children, and grandchildren deserve your best. Your public ministry gains credibility when you demonstrate faithfulness at home.

Be faithful to the church. Devote yourself to the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. Appreciate God’s blessings. Be a generous giver and a team player who encourages others. Make your leaders’ work a joy. Be a friend to those who are often overlooked—the shy, the old, little kids, the socially awkward, people with disabilities, the unpopular, the poor, the neighbor with a questionable reputation. Always keep God’s international family in mind. Pray for and support believers who live in other parts of the world.

Be faithful to your calling. When you serve the Lord, you will be scrutinized and criticized. At times you may be frustrated and disappointed. Often, you will feel tired. Almost always you will be in over your head. You will be “hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

Serve the Lord and you won’t be bored. Persevere, and as time passes you will see lives changed by God’s power, lost sheep find safety in the arms of the Good Shepherd, and longtime believers bear the fruit of the Spirit in fresh new ways. As you do your work, it will be “God who works in you” (Philippians 2:13).

Jesus never said, “Be famous.” He never insisted, “Be popular” or “Be successful.” But he did say, “Be faithful, even to the point of death” (Revelation 2:10). The greatest reward will be for the Lord to say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Personal Challenge: In what areas of your life do you need to cultivate greater faithfulness? Think of a person you know who exemplifies faithfulness to the Lord. What qualities do you see in him or her that you want to emulate? ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. Last week, how specifically did you *either* . . .
 - draw nearer to God?
 - hold unswervingly to the hope you profess?
 - spur on others toward love and good deeds, encouraging them?

2. During the past week, what were you most thankful to God for?

Ask two people to read aloud **Hebrews 11:1-6, 30-40; 12:1-3** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to summarize the passages in a minute or less.

3. From these passages, describe what real, biblical faith looks like?

4. Let's dig deeper:

- What do people of faith *know*?
- What kinds of things do faithful people *do*?
- What kinds of things do faithful people *endure*?
- What kinds of things do faithful people *receive*?
- What kinds of things might faithful people *not receive*?
- What kinds of things do faithful people *look forward to*?
- What do faithful people do to keep from growing weary or losing heart?
- What does it look like for you to fix your eyes on Jesus, the "pioneer and perfecter of faith"?

5. What do you learn about God's nature from these passages?

6. What do you learn about human nature?

7. What do you learn about obeying God from the examples given in these passages?

Note: This week, you are encouraged to break into same-gender subgroups of 3-4 people for the last three questions.

8. What specifically does running "with perseverance the race marked out" for you look like as you put your faith into action this week?

9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

10. What tends to hinder or entangle you from living a life of active faith?

- How can we help you throw that off and run the race marked out for you?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Luke 7:1-10** as we begin a four-week study in the book of Luke with the theme, "Surprise!" You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■