

JOURNEY

into a

*Faith-Filled*

LIFE

Following the  
Faithful through  
Hebrews Chapter 11

CLARK TATUM

**Journey into a Faith Filled Life**

©Sunset Institute Press

Copyright © 2019

Sunset Institute Press

Printed and Bound in the

United States of America

All Rights Reserved

All Scripture quotations, unless indicated, are taken from  
THE HOLY BIBLE: NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®.

Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by

International Bible Society. Used by permission of  
Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Cover Design by Lori Tatum

ISBN 978-0-9600193-5-9

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be  
reproduced in any form without the written permission of  
the author except in the case of brief quotations within  
critical articles and reviews, including translation.

# CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> . . . . .	5
1. Back to the Basics – Faith . . . . .	11
2. Battle of Faiths – Cain and Abel . . . . .	33
3. Living to Please God – Enoch . . . . .	53
4. Upright in An Upside-Down World – Noah . . . . .	76
5. Going Not Knowing – Abraham . . . . .	97
6. Going All the Way – Abraham . . . . .	114
7. Against All Odds – Moses . . . . .	136
8. Bringing Down Walls – Joshua . . . . .	156
9. Messy to Marvelous – Rahab . . . . .	171
10. The Unlikely Hero – Gideon . . . . .	191
11. Power of Perspective – David . . . . .	207
12. Prosperous Faith – The Successful . . . . .	225
13. Follow the Leader – Jesus . . . . .	243

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am thankful for the countless individuals who have encouraged me in my journey of faith. Their encouragement, guidance, and friendship have in various ways contributed to helping this book take shape and become a reality.

At the top of my list of encouragers is my wife Lori. Her support in my journey of faith and kingdom work has contributed in a large way to any good I have accomplished in ministry. I am also grateful for her graphic design talent on the front cover of this book.

Thanks to Sharon Tarbet for her willingness to help me arrange my thoughts into print. I appreciate her invaluable proofreading contribution to this book.

## INTRODUCTION

This *Journey into a Faith-Filled Life* will explore the power of God's Word and the faithful example from the followers of God found in Hebrews Chapter 11. There is much we can learn from these men and women who lived *faith-filled lives* as a result of God's grace. God expects us to live faithfully today. Hebrews 11 records characteristics of faithful living as a blueprint for us on faithfulness.

God's grace that brings salvation also provides Christians the strength to live faithfully. Scripture communicates that grace not only saves, but empowers us to do something. What is it that grace enables us to do? Grace instructs us, "*...to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age*" (Titus 2:12). Experiencing and understanding grace can help us live faith-filled lives.

What does faithfulness to God look like? This is where this 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hebrews becomes especially beneficial in a person's faith journey. Reflecting on the biblical text, coupled with the illustrations and stories found in this book, will strengthen our faith in God. Our conviction in the Bible is God-inspired and filled with God-breathed words that are living and active will also deepen (2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 4:12).

The Bible is more than a good storybook; it is a book on how to live life in every generation. The Bible is our manual for living faith-filled lives. There are too many people in the world de-emphasizing the importance of following God's instruction manual for life. Nearly everything we purchase comes with instructions on proper use and maintenance. We live in a sea of manuals and have them for just about everything.

I know people who would never put anything together without reading the instruction manual. Then, there are the others. Your wife, your husband and friend know which category you fit. There are those who open the box and the first thing they do is throw away the instructions. The others are quick to read the manual before they try to assemble the item or use it.

I remember, as a boy, my parents purchasing me a bicycle. It was a huge present and I was super excited to receive it. The bicycle came in a box – in those days that was not uncommon. My father was a multi-talented person, but reading the instructions was never a priority to him. My mother, on the other hand, had an opposite approach to instruction manuals. Mother would read them and father would throw them away. It made for an interesting childhood as I stood by on the sidelines.

I recall anticipating jumping on my new bike as soon as they put it together. It came with training wheels which I would need, but that would be the final assembly step. I eagerly watched the project begin. My father grabbed his tools and my mother grabbed her aspirin. She did not need her aspirin right away, but she would soon need a pill. My parents labored together, discussed together, and sweated together, and finally they got the box open! Yes, I am exaggerating, but for a boy ready to ride his new bike, it did seem like the assembly took most of the daylight hours.

I am sure I was bugging my parents because I wanted to ride the bike. The impatient kid in me said, “Maybe we should take it back to the store where you bought it. They will know how to put it together.” While that was an absolutely true statement, my words of wisdom did not go over well

with my parents. Although, my father did finally break down and ask for the assembly directions. Mother read them to him, and what a difference it made in the process!

The memory of the struggle my parents had in the assembly process still lingers in my mind. They needed a little help, and help was as close as the directions. I have since learned that we all need a little help in assembling our lives. No matter how hard we try, we just cannot make certain things fit correctly. That is when we need to humble ourselves and gather up the pieces and take them to the Lord.

Think about it. We have instruction manuals for weed eaters, lawn mowers, washing machines, televisions, and alarm clocks. All these things come with little booklets that help us to assemble them and effectively use them. Most folks have accumulated a drawer full of instruction manuals for material possessions, but don't realize that there is also an instruction manual for life. People who believe in God know this. We have an instruction manual, and it is called the Bible.

There are people asking today, "Where is the instruction manual that comes with a child?" The wife or husband asks, "Where is the instruction manual that can teach us how to have a healthy marriage?" Maybe you have heard people ask, "Where is the manual that tells you what to do when your friendship turns sour?"

The Bible helps us with the most important things in life, although many people have never viewed it this way. God's Word communicates what we are to do when we are having a problem. It may not reveal every single detail we may want in a given situation, but it gives us what we need for

life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). God knows what we need and provides us grace and strength to live faithful lives.

I did not grow up in a Christian home, so it took me a while to figure out that God is the master designer of our lives. I had an older friend when I was in high school who worked in a dental laboratory. I was not sure what career path to follow when I graduated, so I decided to work towards becoming a certified dental technician. I graduated high school and soon moved out of my parents' home. I started working and going to school to pursue my quest to become a dental technician. God was not in my thoughts or plans.

The law required that a person had to be a dental technician for five years, regardless of any dental tech schooling, before taking the test to become certified nationally. My earliest goals after high school consisted of exploring life and one day owning my own dental laboratory. It was a roller coaster experience for me as I did all types of things in my search for what life was about. I lived for several years as if there were no God. We all have different backgrounds, but that was my journey towards what would become a faith-filled life.

The first time I remember actually sitting down and reading the Bible was late one night. I started asking myself, "What if? What if there is a God? What if the Bible is what it claims to be? What if there is a heaven and a hell?" My systematic approach to Bible reading at that time, since I had never actually read it before, was to hold my Bible out in front of me, close my eyes, and wherever my fingers opened it is where I would read.

Ecclesiastes is where I found myself, and I read it. This Old Testament book has twelve chapters. For a person who had



never read the Bible before, that was a lot of material to read. I vividly recall reading it twice through that night. I felt like God was talking to me. I would learn later that He really was talking to me, specifically from Ecclesiastes. In time I would come to discover there is no life outside of Jesus, only existence. John 14:6 sums it up well when Jesus said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

The verse that caught my immediate attention in Ecclesiastes that late night long ago was found in the last chapter. Ecclesiastes 12:13: *"Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man."* As I have looked back on those early faithless years of not knowing God or the abundant life found in Jesus, I realize there was at least value in my thinking there had to be more to life. I recall discerning there had to be more to life than what I was experiencing daily.

It was not overnight, but in time I developed a hunger and thirst for God and His life-refreshing Word. I became a Christian within a few months of becoming a certified dental technician. I still had plans to own a dental laboratory, but being a child of God brought a renewed purpose and eternal view of life. There was now a meaning and fulfillment in my life I had not known before. Like other Christians, I wanted to honor God and glorify Him with my life (1 Corinthians 10: 31).

I will forever be grateful to God for His patience and grace and for the Christians who cared enough to plant the seed of God's love and goodness in my heart. God's Word began to reshape my goal and mission in life. My goal of owning a

laboratory altered with time, and I started cutting back on my hours at the lab to go on personal Bible studies with an evangelist. He was an exceptional personal worker. I learned all I could from him and soon I was setting up and conducting in-home Bible studies myself.

A fellow supervisor in the lab where I was working became a Christian and later his entire family did too. It is the greatest thing in the world to be a Christian. The only thing possibly greater is to see others become faithful followers of God. Christians build relationships based on God's kind of love and are mindful of opportunities to share with others how Jesus can make a difference in life and eternity. That brings us back to the all-important word "faith." There is an ongoing process called *maturing in the faith*, and a journey through Hebrews the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter will help us grow in the grace and knowledge of God.

## **BACK TO THE BASICS – FAITH**

(Hebrews 11:1-3)

What is the key that will allow us to live with spiritual victory when we encounter temptation, loneliness, financial pressure, or relationship problems? What is the key that will allow us to live an abundant life on this earth? Before I mention the key word that has powerful implication in one's life, let me express what I have learned from experience. If we ever really come to know the key that unlocks victorious Christian living, Satan is going to try to get us to forget it. If we remember the key, Satan will try to keep us from using it. The key in Hebrews 11 is faith.

One of the most profound questions anyone could ask is, "Does God exist?" Hebrews 11:1-3, <sup>1</sup> *"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. <sup>2</sup> This is what the ancients were commended for. <sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible."*

Hebrews Chapter 11 has to be the highlight of any study on faith. Like no other place in the Scripture, we find in it the importance of getting back to the basics. The basics will enable us to live faithful Christian lives. The subject of faith is the most fundamental topic we could ever discuss. The basic element to successful living in the eyes of God is faith, *"faith in God"* (Mark 11:22).

Satan wants us to forget the basics embedded in key phrase: "faith in God." Isn't it amazing what we can forget

sometimes? Good friend took a road trip with his wife in their truck and cabover camper. This was before the cell phone age. After a couple of hours, they pulled over and took a restroom break. Later they pulled into another place and had lunch. Before they got back into the truck his wife said, "I am going ride in camper and see if I can take a nap."

At the next rest stop the husband quietly opened the camper door to check on his wife. She was still sleeping, so he was courteous and didn't wake her up. After his restroom break, he sat back down in his truck and continued the trip. It was at the next stop he got the shock of his life. He opened the camper only to find his wife missing. He later learned she had woken up at the earlier stop and gone into the restroom. Unaware that she had gone to the restroom and had not yet returned, he took off down the road. At least, that was his story. And as far as I know, he is still sticking with it!

That true story reminds us how easy it is to forget something or someone that we would never imagine possible. It can happen. It happened to Jesus' parents on an occasion. The young boy Jesus was unaccounted for and they did not locate Jesus until three days later. Luke 2:43-45, <sup>43</sup> *"After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it.* <sup>44</sup> *Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends.* <sup>45</sup> *When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him."*

It is the object of faith that makes the believer's faith real and powerful. In other words, faith is only as good as the

object. Automobile engines are powerful, but that power is of no value to you until the engine is turned on. This little thing we call a "key" becomes important. When we sit down in our automobile, we do not expect our car to start without our key, the right key.

Imagine, our neighbor seeing us just sitting in our car and asking, "What are you doing?" We tell him, "Why I am waiting for my car to start." He then asks, "Well what does the car do when you turn the key?" "I am not using the key today; I am just sitting here waiting for it to start." The kind neighbor then says in a polite voice, "Oh really." At this juncture our kind neighbor is going to try to get us some help and get us to a safe place.

I am only pointing out the obvious. This thing called a key becomes the instrument through which the car's power becomes available to us. As our car keys are the instrument through which power becomes available to us in the physical realm, "faith" is the key through which God's power becomes available to us in the spiritual realm. Everybody has faith in something, whether it be a job, a bank account, creativity, friends, or something else. The difference between the faithful Christian and anyone else is faith in God.

Christian faith has an object, and that object is Jesus. Any Christian that intends to be faithful to God must stay focused on the principle of faith. The Christian life begins with faith in Jesus and it continues to walk by faith (Romans 1:17, 2 Corinthians 5:7). God responds to our faith and it is this act of faith on our part that ignites the power of God into our lives. This is one of the marvelous things we will see as we study and explore Hebrews 11. Faith in God ignites the action and power of God into our life so we can live a faith-filled life.

The faith and joy that springs from life with GOD begins on this side of Glory. The book of Ecclesiastes in various ways speaks to the fact that without faith in God, life is like “chasing after the wind.” The NIV uses the word “meaningless” thirty-five times in the short twelve chapters of Ecclesiastes. By faith we begin to experience eternal life and the abundant fullness and significant meaning the Lord desires for us.

With that said it has puzzled me over the years how some start out loving God and then drift away. This only reinforces the value of God’s growth plan – adding to our faith day-by-day. Some believers are like those in the church in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Revelation, they were no longer experiencing the fullness of life. The affection of the church at Ephesus had not completely dried up, but it had lost its original freshness. They had become what is sometimes referred to as “consumer Christians,” not “committed Christians.” Their religion had become loveless and lifeless, meaning dry and mechanical.

These believers had fallen into the trap of doing things for the Lord more out of a duty than joy. Consumer Christians are passionate about their own mission, not the Lord’s mission. Consumer Christians have their own agendas. Their personal interest in Jesus is limited to how He might be able to help them with their own agendas and their own selfish desires. So, in the end, they are really not committed Christians.

The believers in Ephesus had fallen as a result of forsaking their “...*first love*” (Revelation 2:4). What was the answer for them to return? Revelation 2:5 shouts out the way back by using the word “remember.” The New King James Version,

the King James Version, and the English Standard Version all begin v.5 with the word “remember.” They were to recall how far they had moved away from God’s growth plan of loving God and loving people.

It is one thing to talk about love and prayer and claim to believe the Bible. It is another thing to actually love, pray, and make time to read the Word of God. It is one thing to acknowledge that eternity is important, but something is adrift when that same person only lives for the present. We cannot live life to the fullest without taking God at His Word.

If we remember the all-important phrase “faith in God,” Satan will work to keep us from practicing faith. We learn in John’s Gospel that Satan, or the Devil, has a much different plan for us than the Life-Giver. Jesus speaks to the contrast between His plan for us and Satan’s evil intentions. Jesus said, *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”* (John 10:10). I like the King James usage of the phrase *“abundant life”* in this verse. Abundant life is God’s desire, purpose, and plan for people of faith.

Satan desires to steal, kill and destroy our souls, but Jesus came to this earth to live, and ultimately die a sinless death so we might have *abundant life*. John records a special word that Jesus used for “life.” The original Greek word ZOE, in John 10:10, translated “life” in our English translation is a unique word. The Greek language uses three different words for our one English word “life.” The Greeks used the words BIOS, PSUCHE, and ZOE for life.

The Greeks used the word BIOS to indicate physical life, the manner, maintenance, or routine of life. I view BIOS life as

getting up in the morning, taking a shower, eating breakfast, checking email, going to work, eating lunch, work again, returning home, eating supper, and soon off to bed again. BIOS life carries within it the routine of life. This is the routine of getting up in the morning and going here and there and starting it all over again the next day.

The Greek word PSUCHE is also translated “life.” It is sometimes translated as “soul.” It speaks to the idea of individual life, or life’s breath. For example, John 10:11 reads, *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”* The word “life” in v.11 is PSUCHE.

The word I want to call attention to was one of Jesus’ favorite words: “life,” ZOE in the Greek. John often used ZOE himself in reference to Jesus. The word ZOE in John 10:10 expresses a quality of life. When Jesus speaks of coming to the earth to bring abundant life, He is communicating He came so we could enjoy a certain type of life – eternal life. The ZOE life takes us beyond BIOS life. ZOE begins here and now with the Lord and extends into Heaven.

In the 6th chapter of John there are large numbers of people who had been superficially following Jesus and were now beginning to turn back. Jesus, seeing what was taking place, asked His Twelve closest followers, *“You do not want to leave too, do you?”* Simon Peter answered him, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”* (John 6:67-68). ZOE is the word “life” in v.68.

It is not enough to talk about the word for “life” in the Bible or understand its concept; we need to embrace ZOE life for



ourselves. Faith is the key that unlocks abundant life. Biblical faith is derived from trusting God's Word. Romans 10:17, *"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."* The King James Version reads, *"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Romans 10:17).

We learn in Luke 4 that Jesus had fasted for 40 days. His stomach was hungry. He had not had any food for forty days so we can know His stomach screamed for food. Satan came along and launched a fiery missile of temptation. He tempted Jesus by saying in v.3, *"If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."* Jesus responded in v.4 by saying, *"It is written, man does not live on bread alone."* The Hebrew writer mentioned Jesus *"...has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin"* (Hebrews 4:15). It becomes clear from Luke's account Jesus was also tempted in ways we will never be tempted. We will never be tempted to turn stones to bread because we have no power to make that happen.

Matthew adds a more complete response from Jesus to Satan in his desert temptation. Jesus said, *"...Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God"* (Matthew 4:4). Ephesians 6:16 tells believers to *"...take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one."* Jesus' shield of faith was active, and He directs us by His example to the key for living a victorious life.

The key comes down to placing our faith in God's Word. Jesus' victory over Satan came by standing steadfast upon that which God had written. We have to act on the Word of God that is written into our hearts from Scripture. It is not

enough to talk about the concept of the Bible, or have one sitting on our coffee table; we have to read and apply it for ourselves.

Future chapters of this book will remind us what faith is and what faith does. We will see afresh that when our faith is connected to God, there is great power available to us to withstand any temptation or trial. Our faith can hold through any storm when we know the assurance that the Lord will never leave us and will be our helper (Hebrews 13:5-6).

To be a faithful follower of God, it is essential that we stay close to the basic fundamentals of faith. The New International Version gives us an all-inclusive statement about faith, *“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”* (Hebrews 11:1). The King James version says, *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”* (Hebrews 11:1). I long for heaven and the peace of heaven. Is it not our faith in God that gives us substance and assurance of the things for which we hope?

Faith brings “substance” into our thought process. The Hebrews writer connects faith to something else. What is it? Hope. Biblical hope, without faith, is no hope at all. Faith with hope provides a confident expectation. Faith connected to hope provides a believer the ability to have “assurance” that what God says in His Word is His Word. Faith has “substance” that links itself to hope.

The Apostle Paul, who saw the resurrected Lord, was willing to die for his faith in Christ. He wrote about the resurrection. He regularly preached on the death, burial,

and resurrection and that message landed him in jail or prison a number of times. It did not matter to him what happened as a result of preaching Jesus; he would not change the resurrection message to avoid persecution. His faith in God and his hope was connected for this life and the life on the other side with His Lord. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:19, *“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.”*

The NIV continues, <sup>2</sup> *“This is what the ancients were commended for. <sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible”* (Hebrews 11:2-3). Faith is what the ancients were applauded for. Before we move deeper into Hebrews 11 and see what faith does, we are drawn to the most fundamental topic in Scripture – faith. We are taken back in one leap to the creation account in Genesis. The first book in the Bible is called Genesis.

Genesis 1:1, *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”* Genesis opens majestically. God displayed energy and was at work in the beginning. If we had been there, we would not have needed a sign to tell us that God was at work. The Lord of the universe began to unveil His masterpiece. The movie like screen in the first chapter of the Bible spans the universe. In Hebrews we read: *“By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible”* (Hebrews 11:3).

Genesis 1 places us squarely in time and space and gives us front row seats to creation. As the camera for Scripture rolls over the beginning, we are told there was darkness, but suddenly there was a flash of light that came – bursting

across the vast darkness all because God spoke. God said, *“Let there be light.”* We read in Genesis 1, no less than 8 times (vs 3,6,9,11,14,20,24,26), the words, *“God said.”* At the end of every one of those phrases, creative miracles took place.

God spoke, and the universe lit up. God spoke, and mountains began to rise and oceans began to roll. Never underestimate the power of God’s Word. God spoke, as the Bible declares, and the sun began to shine, and stars were made bright, and the moons began to glow. God spoke, and birds began to fly and fish began to swim. God spoke, and Adam and Eve began to walk, and talk. The Psalmist said in Psalms 33:6, *“By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.”* The first scene in our Bible presents us with a world that originates by God and is totally dependent upon God. It is a world called into being and sustained by the power and presence of God.

Faith summons us to address the relation of the Creator with the creation. We are created in the *“image of God”* (Genesis 1:27). I met a Chinese man years ago who was a student at a Christian university. He had recently become a Christian. He was grateful to be on His way to glory. He had gained an understanding of how he could upon his graduation hold a job down, instead of a job holding him down. He learned how he could live in the world, without the world living in him.

The man mentioned the one thing that amazed him when he first came to America was the number of Chinese restaurants we have here. What further surprised him is what we call the *“fortune cookie.”* He was unfamiliar with

them, because there were no fortune cookies where he grew up. The student planned to graduate soon and was excited about returning to China to share his Christian faith.

He asked me a question that made me stop and think. He asked, "If you were going back to China wanting to make an impact for the Lord and they had fortune cookies, what message would message would you put inside it?" I said something, but this is what he told me when I asked him the same question. He mentioned he would tell people that God said, "*Let us make man in our own image, in our likeness, and let them rule of the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, and over all the creatures that move along the ground*" (Genesis 1:26).

Created in His image is the message that triggered this man from China to look closer at Christianity. Perhaps we have not reflected enough in our lives what it means to be made in His image. It opens up the door so we can live faith-filled lives. This aspect of the creation makes it possible for us to be what God has called us to be, faithful.

Few ideas have more far-reaching consequences than one's view of the opening lines of the Bible. The idea of faith as evidenced in creation is that "*...faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*" We will do ourselves a favor by slowing down and absorbing what is going on in the first couple chapters of Genesis. What we have here is God's blueprint for the world: its mountains, seas, sun, moon, stars, and we who have been made in His image.

The things that make up that early list in Genesis are some of the visible evidences of the unseen nothing out of which

God created the world. The thrust of the visible creation is evidence of the unseen God who created it. Romans 1:20, *“For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”*

We did not have to be an eyewitness of the creation account to believe that creation exists and that God made it. Faith, as stated by the Hebrew writer, *“...is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what you do not see.”* The word *certain* or *evidence*, depending on the particular translation, literally means “legal proof” or “confident conviction.” We do not see the Creator, but creation itself demands a Creator. There is evidence of the Creator all around us. Since the Word of God states *in the beginning God made the heavens and the earth*, we can believe in God based on the evidence.

Bible faith is the absolute guarantee of the reality of unseen things that are not seen. When Christians look at the stars, our faith sees Jesus, the bright and morning star. When we look at the sun, our faith sees Jesus, the Light of the World. Faith makes the difference. Stand at the shoreline of the ocean and we can almost feel the awesomeness of His Almighty power. We should be humbled as we stand in awe of the one who can say to the waves in the middle of the raging storm, *“Quiet! Be still!”* and all becomes calm (Mark 4:39).

The Bible claims upward to 3,000 times to be the Word of God. The question is, “Is there evidence that backs up the claims?” Absolutely! There is evidence in a Creator by what we see. The thing that impressed me when I started looking

into this Bible was a passage in Isaiah. Isaiah lived around 700 years B.C. and he wrote something interesting about God's creation. Isaiah 40:22, *"He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in."*

How did Isaiah know that the earth is a circle when most people believed that the earth was flat even for hundreds and hundreds of years later? Was it just a lucky guess by Isaiah or did he get the message by the inspiration of God? It is a legitimate question and there are many others like this one. I added all my questions up and I decided all these prophets of God, and prophecies about Christ could not have been simply a lucky guess. There are over 300 prophecies about Christ hundreds of years before His birth.

How does Bible faith grow? The answer will be of vital interest to us as we follow the faithful through Hebrews 11. Faith grows through our obedience to God's Word. James says in his letter, *"In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead"* (James 2:17). Therefore, faith can only grow as we exercise it. We exercise our faith when we hear the Word of God and it moves us into action. Faith in God moves us in the direction God directs us.

Christians put their faith in a God who cannot lie and cannot fail, and as we do, our faith grows. The only way we will possess a faith that grows into productive faith is by strengthening our faith muscles. We strengthen faith muscles by trusting God enough to do what He says to do. Surely, faith in general moves people into action. We see this to be true in all kinds of things. For example, if we have faith in our doctor when he gives us a prescription, we

won't tear it up and throw it away. No, we will go to the pharmacy and get the pharmacist to fill it. We will then take the medicine, even though you may know little about how the medication works.

It is an amazing step of the faith when our doctor says we have something we never heard of before, then writes a prescription we cannot read, for a medicine we cannot pronounce. Nonetheless, we go the pharmacist to pick up the prescription. We do not personally know pharmacist but when we get home, we still swallow the liquid that tastes awful. Why? Because we have put faith in the doctor and the pharmacist. The key for living an abundant life comes from placing our faith in God and doing what the Great Physician Jesus directs us to do.

The faith and hope of the believers listed in this chapter was generated by, and founded on, the Word of God. All the men and women whose names are listed in chapter 11 could not change their circumstances or predict the consequences, but they trusted God and obeyed Him. True faith is obeying God in spite of our feelings, circumstances, or the consequences.

Many Bible translations begin Hebrews 11:1 the same way. They start by saying, "*Now Faith...*" It made me stop and think about possessing faith in the present time. Having *now faith* is important! The reality of having faith in the *now time* gives substance to the very things we hope for based on God's promises. There is nothing more important for a believer than having faith right now. If there has ever been a time in our life where everything around us seemed to fall apart, we would know the value of having now faith.



If there are things that are pressing on us right now, we need faith in the present, today, not tomorrow. Now faith is the only faith that comes with the hope that will get us through the trials of the past, present, and future. Now faith calls us to remember that Creator God has not failed us in the past, and surely God will be with us now and in the future. If we happen to be feeling the weight of trouble and sin in our life, we need to realize the value of having faith right now!

If we have been in trouble, or if we are in trouble now, or might be in trouble sometime in the future, what we need is biblical faith. We need faith in God and that faith delivers power so we can live life a winner in the eyes of God regardless of what the world says. Faith in the present time will move us ever closer toward the prize of the high calling of God so we can cross God's finish line and receive the victor's prize the apostle speaks (Philippians 3:14).

The Hebrew writer realized some believers were drifting away from faith, and he dealt with that in Hebrews Chapter 2:1. The inspired writer's admonition to those who were drifting off the course of faith is to return to the basics. The admonition was to return to the message that reinforces our faith. Now faith is the faith that understands, obeys and believes in the trustworthiness of the Word of God. If we want to be a winner in God's eyes and one day be with God in Heaven, we must hold tightly to the fundamental principle of faith.

Faith in the now will encourage us and fortify us. Now faith enables us to latch on to the God-given ability to call those things that are not as though they were. It is always time to choose to live by faith. Maybe it is time to stop holding onto

a religion that is based on parents' faith, or grandparents' faith, or spouse's faith. We have to have our own faith, based on our relationship with God according to His Word. Faith rooted and grounded in Jesus Christ is what we all need.

God and His word are trustworthy. Satan wants us to doubt God and His life saving message. Satan is the doubt bringer. We learn this early in Scripture. Satan approached the woman in the garden and presented his doubt question. *"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"* (Genesis 3:1). By asking *"Did God really say?"* Satan was attempting to put doubt into Eve's heart.

He did that same thing in Luke 4 with Jesus, *"If you are the Son of God,"* as if Satan didn't know. May we never forget who started the doubt business in the first place, and our spiritual enemy is still in the doubt business today. Satan desires to replace our trust in God's goodness and his credibility with suspicion and doubt.

Doubt can keep us from moving out in obedience to God. A God-centered faith is not merely a faith that sits back and does nothing at all. A God-centered faith is not merely an intellectual belief. There are people who sincerely think that an intellectual faith is all one needs to please God. What is written? What does the Bible say? *"You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone"* (James 2:24). The New American Standard Bible reads this way in James 2:24, *"You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone."* The demons believe intellectually according to James 2:19, but their belief system is not valid nor pleasing to God.

Maybe we would like to trust God more, but we have doubts – doubts such as wondering if the content of the Bible is really from God. Perhaps we are wrestling with some doubts as to Jesus being the Son of God. If so, we need to reflect on the evidences God has made clear that this book is “God breathed.” Faithful Christians can share with us some of the evidences God presents in His Word.

The gospel of John was written for the primary purpose of creating faith in the Son of God. John 20:30-31, <sup>30</sup> *“Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*

God doesn't abandon us when we have doubts. Doubt is not the same as disbelief. It is simply seeking further evidence to confirm the validity of what appears to be, and professes to be, true. God does not expect us to take everything at surface level without any effort of examination on our part. Nothing could be further from the truth. God will not abandon us just because we have doubts. In fact, if we have doubts, God helps us in our search for answers.

Keep in mind, there is a difference between doubt and close-mindedness. Some people reject Christianity without ever examining it. For whatever reason they decide that it is not true and they never take a closer look. If we talk to them about faith, they turn a deaf ear to us because their minds are made up. This is not doubt, it is close-mindedness. It is not the attitude Thomas had in John's gospel.

John 20:24-29, <sup>24</sup> *Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So*

*the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"<sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

Thomas didn't say, "Nothing will change my mind." He wanted to examine more of the evidence that Jesus was alive. It is obvious Thomas wanted to believe because we find him a week later still hanging around the other disciples. If his mind was already closed, he would have left the others behind. And it is worth observing that Jesus did not punish Thomas for having some doubts. Instead, he appeared specifically to Thomas, called him out of the group to answer his doubts. As a result of hearing Jesus speak to Him, Thomas believed.

If we have doubt, we should not use it as a justification to avoid seeking out the true and living God. God still speaks today through His Word. Instead, let our doubts drive us deeper into a search for truth. Jesus said it this way in His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:7-8,<sup>7</sup> *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."<sup>8</sup> For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."* We should keep searching until we are convinced;

examine the evidence, because Christianity can withstand rigorous investigation.

Perhaps we trust God in some areas of life, but doubt prevents us from trusting Him fully. Doubts have a way of chewing away at our faith. If we doubt God in any area of our life, we should put our trust in God and let him handle our doubts. I know from my own life that when I allow doubt to come into my heart in any area and I do not deal with it, it is just a matter of time before I start doubting God in other areas. Doubting God without a desire to search for the truth, is like the crack in the dike; if we ignore it, it is just going to get worse.

Doubt is a heavy-duty tool that Satan will use to keep us from living a victorious Christian life. We can be wrong on a lot of things in life and be OK, but not on the Lord. The Lord said, <sup>31b</sup> *"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"* (John 8:31-32). We are forewarned in 2 Corinthians 5:10, *"...we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."*

After all the evidence is in, it still requires faith. When Thomas touched Jesus, Jesus said, *"Stop doubting and believe"* (John 20:27b). The implication is that even after Thomas touched the resurrected Christ, he could have continued to doubt. He could have continued to find reasons not to believe. At some point, we must take that step where we stop doubting and start believing. Thomas took that step. He had to discover the truth for himself, and when he did, he said to Jesus, *"My Lord and my God!"*

Healthy Christians live with the conviction that God's Word is trustworthy. 2 Peter 1:16 indicates there are false teachers that teach cleverly invented stories that if we let them, will move us away from God's truth. 2 Peter 1:16, *"We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty."* In verse 16, Peter employs a Greek word MYTHOIS, from which we derive our English word "myth." Apparently, some people in the first century were already attacking the integrity of the gospel by suggesting Jesus' words and deeds were nothing more than a myth or legend.

Peter declared that what the apostles were saying was from God Almighty! He wanted them to know cleverly invented stories will not help in difficult times. Peter continued, <sup>20</sup> *"Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation."* <sup>21</sup> *For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit"* (2 Peter 1:20-21).

It is noticeable upon investigation there was a willingness by the apostles and others to lay down their lives for the sake of the undeniable life-changing truth that had gripped their souls – Jesus is LORD. No one lays down his life for a cleverly invented story. Romans 1:4, tells us Jesus *"...through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord."*

When our Lord came up out of that tomb that Sunday morning, the bodily resurrection changed everything! We worship today because of what Jesus has done for us.

Where we sowed sin, he reaped salvation for us; where we sowed rebellion, he reaped redemption for us; and where we sowed eternal death, he reaped eternal life for us. The resurrection of Jesus was the fact that could not be denied by those with honest hearts and with ears to hear.

## CHAPTER 1 – QUESTIONS TO EXAMINE, EXPERIENCE, AND EMBRACE FAITH

1. What is one of the most profound questions anyone could ask? Why is this question so weighty as it relates to other questions about life? Is there evidence that the Bible is what it claims to be?
2. What does Satan desire to do in contrast to what Jesus' purpose and plan for people of faith?
3. Satan wants us to forget the basics embedded in what key biblical phrase?
4. What is the Greek word Jesus used in John 10:10 for life? What is the significance of this word compared to the Greek word BIOS?
5. Is there evidence that the Bible is what it claims to be? What word does the Hebrew writer connect with faith? Where does the Bible say faith comes? (Romans 10:17) What is the key to living with spiritual victory when encountering temptation? What example does Jesus give us?
6. When we consider the greatness of God in Genesis chapter 1, what effect does this have on our faith? Why is it important to reflect continually on what it means to be made in God's image?
7. How can we strengthen our faith muscles and live faith-filled lives? What is one of Satan's heavy-duty tools and what should we do about it we encounter it? What is significant about the term "now faith" found in many of the translations?
8. What does and 2 Timothy 3:16 and 1 Peter 2:21-22 have in common? What is most noticeable about the faith of the apostles on the other side of the resurrection of Jesus? How does believing in the resurrection strengthen our faith?