

LESSON 5

Developing and Using Your Faith

The word *faith* is used in many different ways in the Christian community. We often say that someone has strong faith or that someone has come to faith. In this lesson, we will examine the essential components of faith—what faith is, why it is vital, and how it is to be used. Understanding faith in God can lead to amazing things!

LESSON OUTLINE

Understanding Faith
Faith and the Christian
The Development of Faith
Testing of Faith
God's Promises

LESSON OBJECTIVES

When you complete this lesson, you should be able to:

- 1: *Define faith.*
- 2: *Indicate the importance of faith to a successful Christian life.*
- 3: *Discuss how faith develops.*
- 4: *Summarize how the Christian's faith will be tested.*
- 5: *Identify promises of faith from God's Word.*

Understanding Faith

Objective 1:
Define faith.

Faith is one of the most important topics in Christianity. It is a part of nearly everything we do, and it determines everything we are. But what exactly is faith? Hebrews 11:1 gives this definition: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

This definition shows that faith is an assurance and a conviction. Faith emerges from the soul when we believe in something that is beyond our five senses, in things that are not seen or sensed. According to this definition, faith is not unusual. Faith is very common.

Almost every moment of every day, human beings place their faith in different things. As the driver of a car speeds toward a busy intersection, he has faith in his brakes, hoping that when he steps on the pedal, the car will slow down. When a person sits down on a chair, he or she has faith in the legs of the chair and is assured that they are strong enough to sustain the weight. When we buy a hamburger and eat it, we show faith in the person who cooked the meat, trusting that it is free from poison or germs.

From these examples, we see that faith is only as good as the object of the faith. Faith must be in something, and faith has value only if it is trusting in something that is worthy of the trust. For example, the driver of the car might have very strong faith in his brakes. But if the brakes fail, his faith is useless.

Faith has power only when it is placed in something that is actually true. This applies to both secular and religious faith. In 1 Corinthians 15:17, Paul writes, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." It does not matter how much faith we have in something. If that "something" is not worthy of our faith, our faith in that object will be worthless. We need only enough faith to bring us to a point of trust and action. But the object of our faith must be faithful and true!

So everyone has faith. The real issue, however, is whether or not we have placed our faith correctly. The Bible is clear that our faith as Christians is to be placed in God. God alone is worthy of our faith. Jesus said, "Have faith in God" (Mark 11:22). Earlier, Proverbs 3:5-6 instructed, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

Faith and the Christian

Objective 2:

Indicate the importance of faith to a successful Christian life.

Why is faith in God so important? The Scriptures give many reasons:

Faith is essential for salvation.

The Christian life begins with faith. To become one of God's children we must have the hope and conviction that God exists, that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead, and that He forgives us and has caused us to be born-again. None of these things can be seen; none can be accomplished through our efforts. Paul writes, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9).

When a prostitute came to Jesus and affectionately washed His feet, the religious people were appalled (Luke 7:39). But by her faith, she found acceptance and forgiveness. "And Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace'" (Luke 7:50).

Our hearts are purified by faith.

Not unlike the prostitute in Luke chapter seven, the heart of every human being has been stained by sin. Because of this sin, people are guilty and separated from God. While some try to cleanse themselves through religious works, Scripture says that we are cleansed through faith in God, not by our own efforts. Paul articulates: "God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them [Gentiles] by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:8–9). The apostle later wrote, "However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness" (Romans 4:5). Our faith in the cleansing

power of Christ's blood removes the sin and guilt from our hearts. With these pure hearts, we can now worship and fellowship with the Godhead.

We are justified by faith.

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:1–2). When we place our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, we no longer face the judgment of God. Because of what Jesus did for us on the Cross, the price of our sins has been paid once and for all (1 Peter 3:18). We are no longer condemned (Romans 8:1)!

This is a complete contrast to the way the world treats us. The world continually judges us by the things we have, the things we do, and the way we look. But once we place our faith in Christ, we are completely accepted by Him because of what He did when He shed His blood for us. This is a powerful reason to pour out our praise and thanks to God!

Faith is essential for living in obedience.

Hebrews 11 lists many heroes of the Old Testament: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Sarah, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses. How did they accomplish such incredible things for God? They did it all “by faith.” They had an assurance of hope and a conviction about things they could not yet see, so they obeyed God’s call and changed history.

We also can create new legacies in the kingdom of God. When we trust in God, placing our faith in Him, the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in us helps us to accomplish great things (Ezekiel 36:27). Without Christ, we “can do nothing” (John 15:5), but all things are possible through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13). This is perhaps one of the most important realizations in our growth and service in the Lord: To be used mightily by God, all we need is faith in His ability to work through us. All of the heroes listed in Hebrews

were ordinary people...but by faith they were willing to allow God to work through them to do great things.

Courage comes from faith.

“Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:6–8). Here, Paul shows the key to courageous living: walking by faith and not by sight. Courage is the will to do something in spite of dangerous circumstances. The danger might be to our health, wealth, reputation, or security. If we live by what we see, we will continually draw back into a “safe zone” of self-protection. By placing our faith in God, we can live beyond what we see, trusting in Him and not in our circumstances.

Courage through faith, however, recognizes that God may choose to not protect us from all peril. Great courage was seen in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (see Daniel 3) when King Nebuchadnezzar tried to compel them to worship false gods and golden idols. How did these young men reply?

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.” (Daniel 3:16–18)

These men were willing to face death rather than compromise their beliefs. They had the faith to believe that God was able to deliver them. But they had a deeper faith as well. They were willing to obey God even if He did not deliver them. God did protect the three men, but in some situations, He does not. Obedient faith in Christ can lead to death or martyrdom. Starting with Stephen (see Acts 7:57–60) and continuing today, God has regularly allowed believers to be killed for their faith. In those times,

our faith in God and hope in heaven give the courage to stand tall against any threat, even if it costs us our lives.

Faith is required to please God.

The writer of Hebrews summed up the importance of faith with these words: “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). Evidently, God takes no pleasure when our lives are lived in self-reliance. He designed us for an intimate and dependent relationship with Him by living by faith in Him. Nothing else pleases God.

This is only a partial list of why faith is so important. Faith is not just a part of the Christian life, it is the foundation. Faith is where our relationship with Christ starts, it is where we grow in intimacy with Him, and it is the key to all peace and purpose in this life and beyond.

The Development of Faith

Objective 3:

Discuss how faith develops.

Our faith in God grows as our confidence in Him is strengthened. For that to happen, our beliefs about God must be truthful and accurate and must come through the Scriptures. Once truthful beliefs about God are established, we must choose to act on those beliefs—even when visible circumstances or internal feelings tell us to do differently.

A. W. Tozer wrote, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us” (1961, 1). This is particularly true when it comes to faith. When we choose to place our faith in God, it is important that we have a solid understanding of who God is and how He works. Through the Bible we hear about God’s awesome and powerful attributes. Believing these truths gives us confidence to trust God wholeheartedly.

Below are powerful, foundational truths about God that cause our faith to be strong:

God Is

While no one has seen God (John 1:18), the evidence of His existence is all around us.

“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” (Romans 1:20). Belief in this basic fact—that God exists—is the starting point of all faith. This belief opens the door to the reality of the spiritual realm and starts the development of faith.

It is difficult to have faith when our facts are weak. Many influential Christians—including C.S. Lewis and Josh McDowell—had to be convinced of the facts of God’s existence before they were willing to place their faith in Him. The study of the facts behind the Christian faith is called apologetics. If you struggle with faith because you are uncertain of the facts, make it a priority to get the answers you need to be convinced of the evidence behind our faith.

God Loves

John 3:16 has been quoted and memorized more often than any other passage of Scripture: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (KJV). Understanding the love of God is necessary for a faith-building relationship with Him.

The love that God has for us is unlike any other kind of love. God’s love is unconditional. This means that His love is based not on what we do, but on who He is. The love we experience in the world is often based on our performance. Human love has conditions that say, “I will love you if...” God’s love has no conditions. He loves us because love is what He is. He does not just choose to love us; the Bible says that He is love (1 John 4:8).

Acceptance of His love makes us willing to obey Him. God’s perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18), and through it we know that He has our best interests.

As our confidence in the truth of God's love grows, so does our faith.

God Provides

Belief in God's provision is a powerful faith builder. In the Western world, we have been taught to trust in our material possessions. This is a foolish faith, for earthly possessions can be taken away from us in an instant. Jesus commands us to have faith in God's provision:

Do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" . . . your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matthew 6:31–34)

God provides what He knows we need, and not necessarily what we want. When He does not provide the way we wish He would, we must place our faith in His love and goodness. He may not provide what we think we need, but He always provides the circumstances we need to develop in our faith.

God is in control

Faith in God grows when we recognize that He is in control of all things. God knows all things (1 John 3:20), He has all power (Jeremiah 32:17–18, 26–27), and He exists everywhere (Jeremiah 23:23–24). Isaiah 45:5–12 commands us to have faith in God's goodness, love, and power—even when bad things are happening around us. Once again, walking by faith gives us great peace in the midst of troubles.

The key to our faith, then, is the faithfulness of God! In the Bible, His faithfulness has been described as:

- Everlasting (Psalm 119:90)
- Established and firm (Psalm 89:2)
- Unfailing (Psalm 89:33)

- Great (Lamentations 3:23)
- Infinite (Psalm 36:5)
- Incomparable (Psalm 89:9)

When we walk by faith, prayer and worship come naturally. Paul exhorts:

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4–7)

God is in you

While our faith must be in God and Christ, we also must have faith in the fact that Christ is in us. Paul writes, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing” (Galatians 2:20–21).

Our faith in God develops in great leaps and bounds when we realize that Christ lives within us. When we gave our lives to Christ, we were truly “born again.” This is both a great mystery and a powerful truth: We no longer live. Christ lives in us. Our life is now His life, and He desires to live His life through ours. Therefore, we must “live by faith in the Son of God.” By trusting in His presence in us, we surrender our lives to Him and allow Him to live through us, moment by moment.

Not only is Christ in us, but also we are in Him! Colossians 3:1–4 records, “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." The nature of faith is again revealed in this passage. Our minds are to be focused not on earthly things, but on God and the incredible truths that we cannot now see. We have died and have been born again. Christ lives in us, and we live in Him!

Asking for more faith

One day, a large crowd gathered around Jesus and His disciples. A man had brought his son to Christ, hoping for healing. The man cried, "If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." Jesus replied, "Everything is possible for him who believes" (Mark 9:22–23). This father cried out to Jesus, asking Him to overcome his unbelief. And Jesus answered by healing the son.

Most people can identify with this father's prayer. While they do have faith, they may also struggle with doubts. When you find yourself with a lack of faith, ask God to help you. Because He lives inside you, He will give you the faith to obey Him in any circumstance. In one instance when the apostles asked the Lord to increase their faith, Jesus replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea," and it will obey you" (Luke 17:6). God can develop even the smallest amount of faith. Place your faith in God, and you will see His will done in your life.

Faith through experience

The first steps of faith are often the most difficult, for we have little previous experience with God. As we grow in knowledge and experience, our faith develops through new hope and stronger convictions about God's faithfulness.

Consider, for a moment, the experiences of Rob Graham, a pastor from the Black Hills of South Dakota. He decided to leave his growing church to start a new one near San Antonio, Texas. He would start with no salary and no members, in an area where there were no homes. Why did he not stay in his safe place in the Dakotas, where

he had a steady income and vibrant ministry? First, he strongly felt God's call. Second, he had been through this before. Four times in his life, Rob had stepped out in faith, leaving behind secure positions to start something new and uncertain. The road had never been easy, and even in this situation, he knew that the church might fail. But Rob's past experiences with God convinced him of God's faithfulness. Now, he knows God is, loves, and provides. These experiences have increased Rob's faith in God.

Reflecting on what God has already done in our lives often makes it easier to step into the unseen future. Romans 8:28 promises, "all things God works for the good of those who love him." In many situations, however, we cannot see the good. It is especially in those moments that we must ask for the faith to continue walking in faith. We will see the good—someday. Today we may have to ask for faith in spite of our circumstances.

Experience with God helps us to understand how He works. Every new situation requires a new step of faith. This was the case when Paul wrote to the new church in Thessalonica: "We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing" (2 Thessalonians 1:3).

Faith growing through the Word

The apostle Paul wrote, "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). What a powerful verse! As you have studied in previous lessons, the Bible is a powerful tool God has placed in our hands. As we study His promises, His attributes, His acts, His will, and His plan, our faith will be nurtured. Do not neglect this vital aspect of the Christian life.

Testing of Faith

Objective 4:

Summarize how the Christian's faith will be tested.

Every Christian's faith will be tested! James 1:2–4 says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

While it is true that everyone lives by faith in something, Christians are called to live by faith in God. The true test of our faith in God comes when the other things or people we trust in—friends, family, finances, possessions, reputations, ministries, and abilities—are threatened or taken away. Testing is inevitable! Proverbs 17:3 says, "The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the heart."

Tests will show what you really believe about God. Your true beliefs are not revealed by your theology (what you say you believe). Your beliefs are revealed by your biography (what you do). James 2:17 says that "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." What you choose to do during these trials will show where your faith really lies. Tests of faith will come either by choice, by force, or by the grave.

By Choice

Each day you have the choice to live by faith, trusting in God rather than in the circumstances you see. You might choose to give more money to charity, leaving you fully dependent on God to meet your needs. You might choose to break off a relationship based on the conviction that God will supply your emotional needs for love. The possibilities are endless. The Holy Spirit and God's Word will guide you in walking by faith and not by sight.

By Force

Sometimes you have no choice in your circumstances. You might lose your job, your mate, or get a life-threatening disease. In those times you are forced to have faith, else you could relapse into stress, worry, and anger. Furthermore, God will sometimes forcefully remove the things you are trusting in so that your faith and freedom in Him will be strengthened.

James 1:2–4 says that this kind of testing produces endurance, and endurance has the result of making us perfect and complete, lacking nothing. The end result is glorious. But the test itself is often very painful and difficult.

By the Grave

Ultimate faith will come as we face death. At that time, we will have to trust in God with everything we have and everything we are. Many who face death do so in fear. But Christians who have had their faith in God strengthened by the Word, prayer, and experience will be able to approach death with hope and confidence.

God's Promises

Objective 5:

Identify promises of faith from God's Word.

Through faith the most valuable of all desires can be ours. Below is a partial list of God's promises concerning faith in Him:

- Faith brings wisdom (James 1:5).
- Faith leads to forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43).
- Faith gives access to God (Ephesians 3:12).
- Faith brings peace and rest (Romans 5:1).
- Faith gives spiritual light (John 12:36, 46).
- Faith moves mountains (Matthew 17:20).
- Faith pleases God (Hebrews 11:6).
- Faith frees from spiritual death (John 11:25–26).
- Faith causes obedience (Matthew 24:45).

- Faith protects from evil (Ephesians 6:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:8).
- Faith causes us to be adopted by God (John 1:12).
- Faith gives us God's inheritance (Acts 26:18).
- Faith leads to spiritual life (John 20:31).
- Faith frees from judgment (John 3:18; Acts 13:39).

Conclusion

Faith in God is essential to the Christian life. It develops through truth, prayer, and experience. Tests of our faith are normal and should be expected . . . and they give us endurance and completeness. Through faith in God we can accomplish amazing things, not because of us, but because of the faithfulness of God himself.

Reference List

Tozer, A. W. 1961. *The Knowledge of the Holy*. New York: HarperCollins.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE

Proverbs 3:5

Romans 5:1

Romans 10:17

Hebrews 11:1, 6

James 1:5

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct answer for each question.

1. According to the book of Hebrews, faith is
 - a) something only a born-again believer can have.
 - b) an assurance and a conviction.
 - c) a feeling of strength and peace.
2. If someone has faith in something that is weak or false, the
 - a) faith is worthless.
 - b) faith will make everything okay.
 - c) strength of the faith will make up for the weakness of the object.
3. Christians are commanded to put faith in
 - a) God only.
 - b) God and themselves only.
 - c) God, themselves, and other things.
4. Which of the following is **not** a result of faith in God?
 - a) The purification of the heart
 - b) The promise that our troubles will be few
 - c) The strengthening of our courage
5. Romans 8:1 says that because of faith in Christ Jesus
 - a) our personal efforts to be holy will be successful.
 - b) we are no longer condemned.
 - c) we are still under the law of sin and death.
6. The "heroes" in Hebrews 11 did amazing things by
 - a) believing in themselves.
 - b) trusting in one another.
 - c) placing their faith in God.
7. The story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego teaches us that
 - a) we are to obey, even if we are not sure God will protect us.
 - b) if we obey God, nothing will harm us.
 - c) our lives will be preserved in all situations if we have faith.

8. *Faith in God develops through all of the following EXCEPT*
 - a) *knowing truth about God's character.*
 - b) *increasing our talents and skills.*
 - c) *prayer.*
9. *God's Word teaches that faith*
 - a) *is not necessary for godly living.*
 - b) *brings peace and rest.*
 - c) *does not free us from judgment.*
10. *God tests our faith to*
 - a) *punish us for disobedience.*
 - b) *develop our endurance and make us complete.*
 - c) *prove our strength.*

ANSWERS TO SELF-TEST

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parentheses.

1. *b* (5.1)
2. *a* (5.1)
3. *a* (5.1)
4. *b* (5.2)
5. *b* (5.2)
6. *c* (5.2)
7. *a* (5.2)
8. *b* (5.3)
9. *b* (5.5)
10. *b* (5.4)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS LESSON

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