

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: Basics: Practices of Believers

Pt 3 Faith

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 08.23-24.08

What do you do when you have a crisis of faith? When it seems like life has hit the wall and you being a follower of Christ come to the point where...where you're not even sure if that matters anymore or helps. What do you do when you sense that the burdens that you are carrying are just too heavy and you're not sure if you can go another step. Cause didn't Jesus say that his burdens would be light? What happened to that? What happens when we get to a point in our life that all the...all the answers that we thought we had don't really make sense and they don't answer the questions we now are experiencing. You see, for believers, the issue of faith is one of the most basic, central issues of our life. It defines who we are. And many times, we're very good at giving theological answers to issues of faith but where we really fall apart...where we tend to fail...is when it becomes practical...when we need to take that issue of faith and we need to move it into the everyday circumstances of life and make it real and make it work. You see, I would fail you this morning, if you left you here with a very good theological concept of faith but yet you did not have a practical applicational understanding of how to be people who live by faith.

The writer of Hebrews, Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 6 says this: Without faith, it is impossible to please him. It's impossible to please God. That makes it all the more important that we have an understanding and an ability to live out our faith. Today, by the end of our time together, I hope to give you five statements of faith. I hope that you would have an understanding of the meaning of faith...that you would know how to measure and evaluate your faith...that'd you be able to pinpoint the areas you need to grow in faith. That you would know how to pray in faith, but more than anything else, that you would know how to live by faith...very basic, very practical. Faith answers the questions of life. Take your Bibles and turn with me to the book I've already referenced, the Book of Hebrews, and in Hebrews, chapter 11...it's often called the hall of fame of faith. If you don't have a Bible, that's alright, there's a Bible in front of you or if you would like to pick up a Bible at the resource center because I'm not going to be able to give you this whole chapter but you might want to read this chapter. There are a lot of chapters in the Bible that specialize on certain concepts. For example, in I Corinthians, chapter 13, that's often called the chapter of love. But in Hebrews, chapter 11, this is called the chapter of faith. And we're just going to make our way through a portion of it but this is a great chapter for you to study and understand. Now it begins with what looks like, what sounds like, a definition, because it is. It's the definition of faith. Look at the very first verse. Now if you're reading along with me in the English Standard Version, I want you to read this out loud with me. If you don't have an English Standard Version, then grab an outline or look at the screens. Let's read this passage together out loud as a congregation. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." "...Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Now when a Hebrew writer wanted to emphasize a point, he would express it in two parallel phrases that often sounded identical. That's what we see going on here. So if you really want to have an understanding of a biblical concept of faith, you just break this down. There are two parts to it. First, faith is the assurance of things hoped for. Stop right there. That's the first phrase. And I really want you to laser focus in on the

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word assurance because it's the Greek word, **hupostatis**, which means a firm ground, a solid foundation. Now think about that for a moment. Faith, according to the scriptures, is something which we can have great assurance of. It's like a firm ground; it's like a solid foundation. It does not mean the possibility but rather it means the certainty. We might not be able to see it but we can be certain about it. The next phrase carries that concept one step further because it implies a response...notice...the conviction of things not seen. We have a personal conviction about things we can't even see. The person of faith lives by his beliefs. Now the rest of the chapter, Hebrews chapter 11, we are going to see examples of that definition illustrated over and over and over again. We're going to see it in the lives of people like Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and the Israelite people, and in the process...get this...you are going to learn how to practically build a life of faith...how to applicationally live out faith. It's not going to be nebulous, it's going to be concrete.

So let's jump in. Let's learn from these people. I'm going to have you move first with me to Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 7. Here we're going to meet Noah. Now you know Noah, Noah built the ark, right? Well, in verse 7, we learn a little bit about him. He's mentioned in the hall of fame of faith. "By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of righteousness that comes by faith." Now Noah is a remarkable man...he's just mentioned here. We really should spend more time studying him because if you think about it, he is a man of great faith. Genesis, chapter 6, verse 9 says of him: "...Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation." Now wouldn't that be a great epitaph...to sum up your life? That you're a great man, you're a great woman, blameless in your generation. Genesis 6 also says that he walked with God, in other words, he was friend of God.

Noah is a great example of the first thing that we take away from this chapter and that's number one: Faith is believing God even when it is unclear. When it...it...whatever it is for you this morning, it...life, your marriage...your job...whatever it represents. Fill in the blank. Faith is believing God even when it is unclear. Think about how unclear this was for Noah. Think about it for a moment. I mean, God comes to him and He says: Noah, I want you build me a cruise ship. Noah had never seen a flood up to this point. What...what's the point of a ship? By the way, it was going to take Noah a hundred and twenty years to finish this project. They lived a lot longer life span at that point in time...a hundred and twenty years. God shows up once...just once. Noah picks that up and he begins building that ship. He doesn't hear from God for a hundred and twenty years. I mean, talk about a man of faith. This is faith believing. You say, where does this type of faith come from? Well, we don't have a lot of time to develop this but this is a great study in and of itself. You can see it in verse 7. We learn of the three aspects that make Noah's faith strong. Let me just mention them to you. The text says, "By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear, constructed an ark..." What...what is that? Well the first thing...first thing we see about him is he responded to God's word. That is always the first true characteristic of

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faith...that you respond to God's word...you listen to it...you obey it. The second thing we see in the text is that he condemned the world. Another way of understanding this is...he refused to follow the world. The world was rebuked because of...of him. He didn't have to say anything...it was just his lifestyle which is always the strongest message you can give. Not what you say, but how you live. Noah is an example of that. He responded to God's word, he refused to follow the world, and what else does it say? It says he was the heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. In other words, he received God's righteousness. These are the three classic marks of faith: Responded to God's word, refused to follow the world, received God's righteousness. So he had a strong faith. God said build the ark; he said fine. I'm going to begin building the ark. Now, was the future for Noah unclear? Absolutely. Did God's request sound somewhat absurd? Absolutely. In the context of everything we know, it sounded very absurd. But have you found that not to be true in your own case...there are many times God tells you to do things, to do something and you think, it just sounds so absurd. Why is that? Well, remember what the definition of faith really is? Definition of faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the convictions of things not seen. We don't always see clearly. We don't always see with the same eyes that God sees. God sees what we can't see. And so he says: Listen, I want you to be a person of faith; I want you to believe even when it's not clear. See, you will face events in your life that are just as unclear to you as the events were unclear in Noah's time. But he took God at his word and he believed. That's the first practical aspect of faith: Is that you? Say OK, the future might be unclear, but I'm going to believe God.

The second we see from the life of Abraham that faith then is obeying God even when it, the future, whatever, doesn't make sense...that we obey God even when it doesn't make sense. It's the next verse, verse 8: "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance." Notice this. "And he went out, not knowing where he was going." Now if you don't know the story of Abraham, you owe it to yourself to read the book of Genesis to...to figure out this great story because God comes to him and I'll condense it for you. They have a conversation. God says to Abraham: Abraham, you're about seventy, you're kind of settled...he was...he was settled in this place called Ur of the Kadesh. How'd you like to live in that city? Where do you live? Ur. Alright...we're getting off track. He lived in the city of Ur. God comes to him and says I'm going to have you move, I'm going to have you go to a foreign country. Abraham says to God, he says, a foreign country, what is it called? God says, I'll name it when you get there. Really? Yes, because I'm going to have out of you built a great nation...out of you is going to come a nation that you can't even fully comprehend but out of you...this seventy year-old man...I'm going to build a great nation. Abraham says out of me? Yes, out of you. Well, how will I know when I get to this place that you're going to build this great nation out of me? God says, I'll tell you; you just go. If you had a conversation like that, would you go? No, you would not go. You're thinking, sure, I'll go, but the reality is, no, we will not go. Because, why? We...we're people who want guarantees...we want to know the plan...we want the

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future...we want to see it laid out before us. And God says, no, Abraham, go. And what does Abraham do? He goes. He

obeys. He is a person of faith. Faith is obeying God even when it doesn't make sense... even when the future is not clear. Even when times are tough, it's obeyed. I was thinking about a time in my life like that this week and looking back, you know you have 20-20 vision in hindsight. But in the midst of it, it can be a very difficult, very challenging, very trying time, and you're not sure if you're going to move through in obedience.

Michelle and I had graduated from college, we got married, we were involved in a work here in town...a ministry here in town. But we felt like it was time for us to move on, continue our education and time for me to go to seminary. And so I looked all over the country at different seminaries and I was really laserizing in on Reformed Theological Seminary in Florida. Michelle's family comes from Florida; I thought this would be great. It's Florida...what a great place to study...plus we're close to family and so I travelled to Reformed Theological Seminary and I just didn't get the vibes. I got there and I just had this real uneasy sense. I remember actually then driving to Tampa where my father-in-law lives and sitting on his porch...he has a swing on his porch...and I just...feel so uneasy about coming here. And he said, well, then don't. Don't move here. That's God's way of telling you, you need to keep looking. And so I went home, I look his advice, I keep looking. I kept looking for any place that would just bring a sense of excitement to my life. And I was like...you know, Colorado has a great seminary...maybe I can go to Colorado...what a great place to live. Colorado, you know. And I was looking at Seattle and different places around the country. And I kept getting drawn to Dallas, Texas. And you might think, well, what's wrong with Dallas, Texas? Well, Dallas, Texas...the seminary in Dallas, Texas is in downtown Dallas, Texas. I mean, two miles away from the center of town...nothing but concrete. And it's in the worst neighborhood...I mean...and it's hot. I'm not talking about just hot...I'm talking about hot!! You can literally boil an egg on the sidewalk in the middle of the summer...I've tried it. When you're a seminary student, you're poor and you're hungry, you'll do just about anything to have a good lunch. I mean it is hot...very, very, very hot...expensive to live there. I didn't know how we're going...so I said, you know what, Lord, I'm getting this sense...everyone...all my professors went to Dallas seminary, books I read come from authors who went to Dallas seminary....I thought, alright, I'm going to check it out. So I'm there....I'm in the middle of this campus and it's not a real impressive campus by any means...but I'm getting this sense this is where God wants me to be and Michelle is getting the same feeling. We rent an apartment, we go back home, we get our stuff, we start the move process. She has to actually go a week ahead of me because she got a job at the inner city schools of Dallas and so she was starting. A friend...we took the truck...packed it up a week later...drove to Dallas. We hit downtown Dallas 5:00 o'clock rush hour. Right downtown where all the arteries come in together...it's called the mix master of the metroplex. And it really is because it's a mess at 5 o'clock. I mean there's millions of cars on the road and they're all just going as fast as you can imagine and if you get off on a wrong...you could end in parts of the

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city...you could be on this thing for your life and you could just never get off of it. And of course, you know, my propensity of directions as it is, we got lost. We were

running late. Finally we find the apartment. We get there...we unpack the truck. Just exhausted...throw the mattress on the floor...hit the deck. I mean...we're just about out...we had a screen door in our bedroom and went out to this little porch and we left it open just a little bit just so we could get some fresh air and hear the sounds of the city. Just as we're ready to doze off, we hear this sound that sounds a lot like gunfire. And Michelle says, is that a gun? I said, nah, just a car backfiring. Well, then we hear it like six-seven-eight more times really fast right outside our window. You see, you need to understand that when we moved to this place, it was the only place we could afford...it was about a mile away from the seminary. Literally it was like a compound; it had razor wire all the way around the fencing of this apartment complex. And you had to have three keys to get in. One key to get into the parking garage...you'd put your key in...the gate would open...you would pull in...the gate would close. And then you would need another gate to get inner...inside of the apartment complex itself. And, if by the way, if you forgot that key, you were trapped in the parking garage cause you couldn't get out, you couldn't get in...I'll tell you that story some other time. But you're stuck in there...but you see...once you get in then, you're trapped into this area and...you know...you're looking around at this fencing...and you know, it just really feels like a jail. And then you get into your apartment...so three keys. And I'm here, downtown...and...you know I'm from here...I'm from the country. I'm thinking, God, you've got the wrong boy. I'm not supposed to be here. This is...and the transition from here to there was very difficult for me...much more so than I had imagined. I was within about the middle of my first year; it's a four-year program and I'm thinking...I'm not going to make it. In the midst of that time, I had met one of my professors...his name was Aubrey Malphurs. Now that name probably means nothing to you. He's been serving at the seminary for years...a gentle, gentle man. He actually serves as the chair of the church planting department and I was interested in planting churches...part of my degree...learned about that. And so we became friends...we've actually become lifelong friends now. And in the midst of this really difficult period, I went to him and said, "Dr. Malphurs, I think I got to go home. This is...is just not working for me." And he said, "Did God call you to Dallas Theological Seminary?" And I said yes...I really think that God called me here. He said, then, by faith, you need to obey. And he'll work out the details. The best piece of advice that I'd ever received from a professor. Because I had no idea that over the course of the next four years that he was going to teach me things and expose me to new concepts of the church that would revolutionize my thinking. This was just fifteen years ago...this was just at the beginning of the contemporary church movement. This whole concept where you...you know...you could have a church that would really be just kind of easy...you...you wouldn't make people feel like they had to be a certain way or look a certain way or do a certain thing. They would come in with the idea I just want to learn...what does it mean to follow Christ and we would take away all that other clutter. This is just at the beginning of the idea that you could dismantle the organ and you could put a band and it would still be honoring to God. I know...that's kind of...you know...beyond the way you can think now because you experience it but

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that was brand new or the idea that you didn't have to get dressed up in a suit...you could just come in your street clothes....who you are. You didn't have to put money in an

offering plate....we could put it in a black box back there because if you felt God was calling you to give, you would give, you wouldn't feel pressure to give. All these were new ideas back then and he was teaching them to me. I had no idea in that first year that I would take those exact same concepts and God would call me back here to start this church. And now you and I are living the fruits of Aubrey Malphurs' teaching. But when I was getting ready to give up, I had no idea of the future.

You see, that's why faith is obeying God even when it doesn't make sense. This is as if God is saying I want you to trust me and the clearest example of trust is just to obey. You don't have to have all the details...just obey. And so we see, Noah, his faith is believing God even when it is unclear and, Abraham, faith is obeying God even when it doesn't make sense.

Now number three: We learn from Moses that faith is following God even when it looks hopeless. Faith is following God even when it looks hopeless. You know the story of Moses. There's times that it looked hopeless. We don't have time to go through the whole thing so let me just laser in on verse 27 of Hebrews 11. It really gets to the gist of it. "By faith, he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured seeing him who is invisible." Now you know the story. Moses gets a call from God that he is to go to Pharaoh, by the way, the ruler of the world at this time, and he is suppose to say to him, you need to let my people, the Hebrew people, go which by the way was a huge economic risk for Pharaoh because he had enslaved millions of the Hebrew people in their economy to work for free. Moses is coming to him and saying now you need to let my people go. Pharaoh says no way. And so he comes back to him over and over again. And he says, alright, let's try ten plagues. Let's see how you react to ten plagues. And he comes back after every plague...you got let my people go. No...keeps getting stronger, stronger...finally, Pharaoh says fine, take the people and go. Right? And the question you need to ask yourself is, during the process, because it's such a small story, but during the process, you have to think, where did Moses develop the endurance to keep going? Where did he develop the tenacity just to keep sticking it out even when it looked hopeless? Well, the answer lies in the phrase...this last phrase...in verse 27. He saw him who is invisible. He saw what was unseen. He could see what no one else could see. You...you hear what he's saying? I kept my eye on God, not on the problem and therein lies the principle of faith. You see, when we have problems, if we start putting our eyes on the problem and taking our eyes off God, we will always falter and fail. Then Moses is saying, no, faith is following God even when it looks hopeless and the way you do that is by keeping your eye on God. Now did that have a residual effect in Moses' life? You bet...right into the whole people of Israel. Cause what happened? The people of Israel get out, they get going, Pharaoh changes his mind. He sends the army to chase after them. So now behind them is Pharaoh's army and in front of them is the Red Sea. What are they going to do? So they come running up to Red Sea in verse 29. It says by faith, the people crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land. What does that

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mean? They came right up to it, Moses hits it with the staff...Walah! Parts. Can you imagine that? I imagine there were all kinds of back up and breaking going on and stopping as

people were kind of running into...looking at this huge wall and someone saying I'm not going in there. Right? But then someone says no...no...no...we're a people of faith. Moses has been doing it. We'll do it and they go into the Red Sea and they cross it and just as the army of Pharaoh go in, it closes in on them. They're people of faith. You see it's a residual effect. Following God is an act of faith even when it looks hopeless. What looks hopeless in your life? What looks hopeless? Does your marriage look hopeless? Does your job look hopeless? Does your economy look hopeless? Does your health look hopeless? What is it that looks hopeless? You see, you're a person of faith. I've been hearing these...the last couple of weeks...it's terrible around here...everything is falling apart. And I look around here...we've got concrete man, we've got real estate man, we've got a contractor. You know, we've got people who are in real estate. We've got a mortgage broker. We have people over here that work for GM.....city schools. You know, all of you are feeling the pressure of right now and you're wondering what is going to happen with our economy. But you are people of faith, aren't you? You see, people of faith always in times of crisis follow God relentlessly even when it looks hopeless. Why? Because the definition of faith is still the same. It is the conviction of things...what? Not seen. So we are people of faith. Faith is obeying...or believing God even when it's unclear. Obeying God when it doesn't make sense. Following God when it looks hopeless.

Number four: Faith is thanking God even before it is received. Let me wrap this up real quick with these last two points. Faith is thanking God even before it is received. Do you remember the story of Joshua and Jericho that I told you last week? Well, they made it into the hall of fame. Verse 30: "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days." Remember the story. Joshua is giving a lead now. He is to lead the people into the promised land. And what do they do? They come up against the most fortified city in the world, Jericho. What is God's plan? God's plan...no, it's not a military battle. You're just to walk around it seven times. That's God's plan. But I failed to tell you one of the most critical aspects of the story. And that is the seventh time around, you know what they were suppose to do? Shout. Now theologians and scholars differ and they argue back and forth on what that means. Was that military shout? Were they preparing for battle? Others say, no, no, it's not that. It was a celebration shout. It was a worship shout. It was a thanksgiving shout. I tend to fall on the latter side of that. I think what God was saying is on your seventh time around, I want you to worship me, I want you to thank me, I want you to shout out to me because what is God teaching them? God is teaching them faith. He is saying, I want you to thank me before you receive the city. Thank me in advance. And isn't that faith? Cause faith isn't believing God can do it. Faith isn't believing...isn't even believing God will do it. Faith is thanking God in advance because you're confident he's going to do it. That's true faith. Faith is the idea that God is already in the process of doing it. And you remember? You don't there, just let me do it for you. Mark 11:24: Jesus teaching the disciples how to pray. And what

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does he say? Interesting turn of a phrase. He says: I'll tell you what, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you've received it and it will be yours. Don't come to me in prayers that you don't believe. Pray believing. That is a key aspect of scripture. We

pray believing. And so what does that mean? We can be people who are thankful before we receive it. Because if we receive what we pray for and then we thank God, that's not faith, that's gratitude, right? No, being a person of faith is saying that I'm going to thank you, God, even before I receive it.

And then number five may be the turn in everything you have learned...is that true faith is trusting God even when it isn't received. True faith is trusting God when it...whatever it is for you...isn't received. Now this is kind of a lengthy passage but I think it's worth taking a couple of minutes and looking at it. Look in Hebrews 11:32 all the way through 39. The writer of Hebrew says: What more shall I say for the time would fail me. He's a preacher who's run out of time. He's...like I'm out of time so I've got to tell you of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms and forced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lying, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the swords, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. All the great things these people did. Woman received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refused to accept release so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging and even chains in imprisonment. What does this tell you? That faith doesn't exempt you from problems. They were stoned, they were sawed in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats and dust-inflicted, mistreated of whom the world was not worthy. What a great line! Wandering about in the desert, in the mountains, and in the dens and caves of the earth. Verse 39: And all of these, though commended through their faith did not receive what was promised. You're saying what...what's going on here? What did they not receive? Remember these are illustrations and examples of people from the Old Testament. In other words, they did not get to live long enough to see their Messiah. These are people who had been waiting to see the Messiah. These are people who are willing to die, suffer in torture in anticipation of the Messiah and he's wrapping it up and saying they might have been commended for their faith, but they did not receive the promise. Here's a valuable lesson. It's easy to have faith when everything is going good. But real faith comes when dreams are delayed...when you have to wait...when you have to trust God because you are not receiving what you think you so desperately need. Why does God do that? Well, I think it's clear from scripture God sometimes decides our faith will be stronger by not giving us what we think we need. And so he says, trust me. So faith is believing God even when it's unclear, obeying God even when it doesn't make sense, following God even when it looks hopeless, thanking God even before you receive it and trusting God even when you don't receive it. You know, you could really put that into a prayer. Because if you struggle with an issue of faith and all of you came in those doors with something. I don't think it was by chance. But all of you came into this place, through those doors, sat down in the seats that you're sitting in with something stirring on your heart and something clicked this morning. And now that's an issue of prayer for

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you. And that's what I did. I put this together in a prayer at the end of your outline...I know some of you like...to cut these things out and you take them to work with you or you tape them up on your mirror at home. And it becomes a part of your daily ritual just

to begin to pray. Well, that's what this prayer can be cause this is a prayer of faith. And maybe some of you need to pray this prayer this morning. Maybe you need to pray it with me. Well, why don't we do that right now. Let's just bow our heads and let's pray this prayer. We're not going to pray it out loud. This is just something between you and God. I'll pray and just in your own spirit, you join in. Dear God, I know that without faith it is impossible to please you. And so help me this week to live by faith. Help me to believe when it is unclear. Help me to obey even when it doesn't make sense. Help me to follow even when it looks hopeless. Help me to be thankful even before I receive it, in trusting, even if it is not received. For God, I know, you want what's best for me and I want to follow you. God, I pray that these are the prayers of your people and that you will answer them. Rise up a whole army of faithful men and women who believe you even when life is unclear, and clouded in mystery, obey you even when it doesn't make sense, follows you even when life looks hopeless, to thank you even before they have received it but always trusting even if they don't know that you are God who loves us and cares for us and gives us what we need. Thank you for being our heavenly Father, good God. In Jesus Name. Amen.