

## Grow in Christlikeness (5): Faith

### Hebrews 11:6 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

<sup>6</sup>And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for the one who comes to God must believe that He exists, and *that* He proves to be One who rewards those who (*diligently-KJV*) seek Him.

### Romans 4:20-21 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

<sup>20</sup>yet, with respect to the promise of God, he (*Abraham-kc*) did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, <sup>21</sup>and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.

## Introduction

We are back on the sermon series “Grow in Christlikeness.” Six sermons all together and today we are on the number 5. Here’s a recap of what I have talked about so far. As we grow mature in Christ, we will see in our daily lives the signs of love, humility, purity, and honesty.

We are called to love one another as Christ has loved us both unconditionally and sacrificially. Do you love others unconditionally and sacrificially? We are called to humble ourselves before the Lord,

because God is opposed to the proud. Are you humble and teachable? We are called to live a life of purity apart from sexual immorality. Those who practice sexual immorality have no inheritance in the kingdom of God. God also has called us to live honestly in word and deed. He is the God of truth and light. No falsehood and dishonesty have a place in His presence. We as the children of light ought to live a life with honesty and sincerity. This morning, I would like to add another aspect of growing in Christ: faith.

## **Content**

Can a man bear a child? No. Can anyone live without breathing more than 5 minutes? Impossible. The key word here is *impossible*. No matter how hard you try, there are certain things you simply can't do. In the same way, God says, "Without faith, it is *impossible* to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). What is faith that without it we cannot please God at all? Why is faith so important that Jesus commands us, "Have faith in God" (Mark 11:22)?

Why does faith matter? It matters because it is the foundation upon which we build our relationship with God through Jesus. Jesus offers salvation and we receive by faith. Like a house built on the sand won't stand against wind and waves, without faith, our relationship with God will crumble down. Faith is also the door that gives us access to God's throne room. Without faith, we cannot see or please God.

When it comes down to pleasing the Lord, only two things are possible: either we please Him or we don't. Faith determines that. With faith, we please God. Without it, we don't. One thing is for sure: if we are serious about our relationship with God, we must bring faith.

What is faith? Let's begin with the standard definition in dictionary. Oxford Dictionary: *Strong Religious Belief*. That's rather broad and general.

In the Scripture, over 200 references under "faith," "belief," or "to believe" define faith to believe in God's existence, God's power, God's creation, God's promise, God's provision, and trust in His goodwill and guidance.

Here's a biblical definition: In one sentence, *faith is belief and trust in God*.

In today's text, in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, we can find three characteristics of faith.

**1. Faith is to believe in God's existence:** Please listen again to verse 6: <sup>6</sup> *And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God **must** believe that He **is (present tense)** and that He is a rewarder of those who (diligently- kc) seek Him.*

If we claim that we believe in God, we **must** believe that God actually exists and that He is alive. We cannot believe **only** in the idea of God like some people do (E.g., An atheist pastor loves the idea of God yet denies the existence of an actual God. Such a person never experienced God's power in his life). We must believe that God is

(that means, He exists in the present tense all the time: the name of the LORD—I **AM**).

God has given us the privilege to experience Him and His wonderful power in the present tense, here and now. Sadly, too many of us treat and experience God as a Sunday-morning God—a once-a-week God, or worse, a once-a-month God, or the worst a twice-a-year God. For the rest of the week (6 out of 7 days— 85% of the time), He is unwanted. He is dormant 6 days a week and only becomes alive on Sundays. Worse, for many of us, God lives only in our First-Aid kit: needed and called for only in emergencies. No wonder our perception of God is way off. No wonder we seldom experience the living God. Ask yourself a question: Is my God the God of the present? Do I experience Him here and now? If not, it's about time that you not only believed that He is alive but also experienced His power in the present: here and now. Let's say it together: *Lord, I believe/ that you exist/ here and now. Help me/ to experience/ your power today.*

**2. Faith is to believe that God rewards those who seek Him diligently.** Those who come to God must believe that He is a rewarder. Please pay attention to the phrase “to seek Him diligently.” Its original Greek means to seek out, search for with an intention to find. Seek Him **Diligently**. Earnestly. Not casually or lazily. Do you seek Him diligently? Here's what it means to seek God diligently.

First, it means you want God in your life. You desire to have relationship with Him. Next, it means you focus on Him with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength (Deuteronomy 4:29). You won't stop searching until you find Him. It also means you set aside everything in order to hear God's voice and His will. You and the Lord both know what it is like to turn your heart and mind to Him: it requires giving your undivided attention to Him. 100%. Not a single percent less. It means to have Him as your first priority in life. It means a full surrender to Him. It means a complete trust and obedience to God.

In fact, the Bible is full of stories of people who sought God with all their hearts and minds. God rewarded them with the miracles that followed their prayers. For instance, Elijah prayed to God not to give rain in Israel, and there was no rain for three years and six months (James 5:17). Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain. Consider Daniel in the Lion's den. What do you think he was doing in the den, sitting in front of the hungry lions? No time to think about a vacation in the Bahamas, right? He prayed with all his heart and mind for God's protection, and God rewarded him by sending His angels to shut up the lions' mouths. What about Peter and Paul? What about all the witnesses we have throughout Christian history? All of them have one thing in common: They gave their hearts 100% to the Lord and sought Him diligently in whatever situations they were in. As a result, God rewarded them with deliverance from their troubles. Don't think that they were all superhuman beings. No, they were all ordinary people like us (James 5:17). And we all have the same God.

2 Chronicles 16:9 says, “For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His.” Is your heart completely His? The eyes of the LORD are still moving to and fro today. When his eyes find you, God will reward you.

**3. Faith is to obey God, trusting in His faithfulness,** even though you don’t fully understand what’s going on around you (Hebrews 11:7-8). Suppose God appeared in your dream last night and told you to build an ark: 450 foot long, 75 foot wide, and 45 foot high, longer than the football field (360×160 ft.). How would you respond to His command? What would you say to Him? I guess most of us would come up with excuses why we can’t do it saying, “Lord, *I am afraid you picked the wrong person,*” “Are you really God? *I’d better check with my pastor about who you truly are,*” or “Can you appear in my dream again tonight? *I just want to make sure it is you.*”

Suppose this time that you are a 75-year-old man. You are quite content with your life achievements and happy where you are. The only thing you don’t have is your own child, but that’s alright: no need for adventure or excitement now. Then, one night, out of nowhere, God asks you to leave your hometown for an unknown country in South America: a place you’ve never been before, and you know nobody there. You don’t even speak Spanish. That’s not all. God even promises a brand-new baby between you and your wife who is in her 60s. *Your own son by your wife,* God says. Whoa... Really?

Well, the two examples are not far-fetched. They are taken from actual stories in the Bible: Noah and Abraham. Think of your reactions to God. Most of us want to make sure that everything is going to be alright before we commit ourselves to His command, don't we? Those two men were different, though. They obeyed God's voice, literally blindly, with no clue whatsoever about the outcome of their commitments. In fact, they didn't have the slightest idea what would happen next, other than just carrying out God's command one day at a time. To many people, they both were crazy or even senile. Faith sometimes appears crazy.

By the way, I wonder why the LORD chose those two, one was 600 years old and the other was 75, although there must have been plenty other 'young and strong' candidates? For one reason: faith in God. God knew what kind of heart they had: the heart that believed in God and His power. The heart that was determined to follow whatever God commanded them to do. The heart that didn't mind being called names by the world. The heart that didn't question God about whether it was going to work or not. The heart that simply listened to the Lord and trusted in His good will. That heart was counted right in the sight of God. That heart is called faith.

## **Conclusion**

God invites all of us this morning to come on-board His ship. The name of the ship is "Faith." Jesus is the Captain of the boat. He is calling us to leave the shore and to join Him in a voyage in the Sea of Life. Some of us are reluctant to leave our comfortable

lifestyles on the ground. Others are hesitant to hop aboard due to fear of the wind and waves. Many of us are still calculating the odds of coming back safe to the shore as the boat is leaving. Only a few of us will respond to His call with gusto—Lord, wherever you lead me, I will go. Are you aboard? Are you still standing at the shore? Are you coming? Let's pray.