

What Faith is and What faith does.

Hebrews 11:1-16.

Imagine you are standing on the bottom rung of a staircase that winds its way up. Now imagine that you cannot see what is beyond the 2nd step. Do you have the faith to take the next step even if you cannot see the full staircase?



You can't just believe in the stairs or even know that they are there. You actually have to make a decision to change from where you are standing to climb the stairs.

It is one thing to know what a staircase is and how you can climb it – you may have accumulated the knowledge but it is another thing to act with firmness, putting your knowledge into practice and make the decision to take that step.

We must use our minds to think things through but we must leave room for the unexplainable works of God.

Do you believe that faith needs to make sense or doesn't need to make sense? Some people think no-one can possibly fully understand God – so why try? Others believe that truth is irrational so you can't have true faith.

The truth is that God gave us minds that should be developed and used. To ignore intellectual growth is to live a stunted and naïve life. God wants our trust and faith even while we ponder and wonder about so many matters mysterious to us.

But we do not believe in a void nor take a leap into the dark. Faith is reasonable, though reason alone cannot explain the whole of it.

Believing that God exists is only the beginning – even the demons believe that much. God will not settle for mere acknowledgement of His existence, He wants a faith that will lead to a personal, dynamic relationship.

Faith is an action word – faith does and faith works.

Hebrews 11 is known as the “faith chapter” of the Bible and it cites many Old Testament heroes of faith. Yet the word **faith** is not found in the Hebrew Bible.

We usually think of faith as something which is connected to organized religion and may have many preconceived notions about it, but when you look at the root of the word in Hebrew it turns out differently.

In English translations there is usually just one specific word chosen over another. In Hebrew, a word can have many different meanings at the same time that all group around a core idea.

The Hebrew word for faith is **Eemunah** – it is an almost subconscious influence in our life that nurtures us and gently guides us in our journey through this world.

When do you have a sense of faith – is it only during the hard times when you are hanging your hopes on a higher power to help you overcome a difficulty or crisis and then, what happens? Do you tend to forget it when everything is fine again?

The two parts of the Hebrew word we call faith is:

to confirm, be certain, sure or be assured; and

to be true, reliable or faithful.

So our faith consists of these two parts – for us to be assured in a reliable God who nurtures us in this world.

The sense of faith is what aligns us with the intent of goodness behind our life situations. To the Hebrews, faith was not merely believing – it was a decision bringing about a change in the way a person lived.

The emphasis about faith under the Old Testament covenant was on working at maintaining the Law of Sacrifices and Ceremonies – faithfulness. But under the New Testament covenant, the primary emphasis is on trusting Christ's finished work. There was nothing in the Old Testament text that could save the soul but salvation was revealed in Christ – so the word faith began when salvation came to man through faith in Jesus Christ.

The mind

You cannot have saving faith unless your mind embraces the content of the gospel.

You may accept the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as fact but you must also understand the personal implications of those events in your life.

Faith is not blind but it is only as valid as the truthfulness of its object.

The beginning point of faith is believing God's character – He is who He says He is.

The end point of faith is believing in God's promises – He will do what He says He will do.

When we believe that God will fulfill His promises even though we don't see those promises materializing yet, we demonstrate true faith.

God called the universe into existence out of nothing. He declared that it was to be and it was.

Our faith is in the God who created the entire universe by His Word. God's Word has awesome power.

When He speaks – do you listen and respond?

How can you better prepare yourself to respond to God's word?

Cain and Abel were Adam and Eve's first 2 sons. Abel offered a sacrifice that pleased God while Cain's sacrifice was unacceptable. Abel's sacrifice of an animal substitute was more acceptable to God because it was a blood sacrifice and also because of Abel's attitude when he offered it.

How would you have reacted if you were Noah? Here you are, living in the middle of an extremely dry place with rarely any rain and God says: build me a boat!

Noah's neighbours thought he had lost the plot, but Noah did what God wanted and was saved.

Remember if God asks you to do something, He will give you the necessary strength to carry out the task.

What about Abraham – he was enjoying his peaceful life when God said – I want you to pack up and go to another land. And he did. True test of his faith.

Do not be surprised if God asks you to give up secure, familiar surroundings in order to carry out His will.

Many Christians become frustrated and defeated because their needs, wants, expectations and demands are not immediately met when they accept Christ as Saviour.

They become impatient and want to quit.

Are you discouraged because the achievement of your goal seems far away?

The author of Hebrews is trying to encourage believers not to abandon Christ because of opposition and difficulties they faced. He cites these treasured heroes as inspirations for

having faith in God even when prayers are not answered and God seems silent.

How about you today?

Although you may have been persuaded to receive the gospel truth, you may still not accept it.

Saving faith consists of someone embracing all of Christ with their whole being. It does not bypass the mind and emotions. Intellectual understanding or warm feelings do not qualify as biblical faith unless they lead to trust and action.

Then you will respond with a personal commitment to and complete acceptance of Christ as the only hope for eternal salvation.

Faith is a real conviction based upon the revelation of God.

Romans 10:17 says: faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word about Christ.