

A Description of Faith

Understanding What Faith Is

Hebrews 11:1-3, 6

Disclaimer: The following are Dr. Jeff Stott's sermon notes and manuscript. They have not been carefully proofed for spelling or grammar. They are printed and given "as is." All Scripture quotes are from the New Testament Version unless noted.

Today we begin a series on faith, on how to live life in the faith lane. God is serious about us living by faith. Over and over again we are told to live by faith and the benefits of faith. The Bible says we are justified before God by faith in His Son Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:28); we are to stand firm in our faith (1 Cor. 16:13); we are to live by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). We are told we are saved by faith (Eph. 2:8) and we are to take up the shield of faith in spiritual battles (Eph. 6:16). Since you are saved by faith, and you are to live by faith, and since faith is an important part of your success in spiritual warfare then you need to know what faith is.

We do not find a definition of faith in the Bible, but we do find a description of it in Hebrews 11. Look at **Hebrews 11:1**, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

I want us to see two descriptions of what faith is and how it operates in our lives. So what is faith?

Faith is Being Sure

First of all, faith is being sure. Hebrews 11:1 says, "Faith is being sure of what we hope for." This phrase "faith is being sure" is best understood with three words: *assurance*, *substance*, and *reality*. Let's look at each one to help us understand the depth of faith.

First, faith is the assurance of what we hope for (NASB). Let's say I owed you \$100 and you say, "Where is my \$100 bucks." Then I say, "I don't have it on me, but I do have my check book, so let me write you a check." When you accept the check you are saying that you have *assurance* that the money is in my account and the bank will make it good and honor the check. You have assurance that what has been promised in the form of a check is good. To you, the check is as good as cash in hand. You have complete confidence that you will have the cash because you have the check. That's what faith is. Faith is having complete assurance and confidence that you will receive

whatever the Bible says you are to receive. Faith is like looking at the Bible as the check believing that you have whatever is on that check, all you have to do is go cash it in. Faith is assurance in what God says is true. Whenever God says something you believe it. Whenever God says, "If you will do this... then this will happen." You believe. So faith is the assurance of what we hope for.

Secondly, faith is the substance of what we hope for (KJV). The word "substance" refers to having something beneath you to stand on. The word "sub" means underneath, like a submarine. "Stance" means something to stand on. A "sub-stance" is something beneath you that is firm that can hold you up. For example, let's say I came in here on crutches. You say, "Pastor, what happened?" I would tell you how I was jogging and stepped into a hole and badly twisted my ankle. So I needed these crutches to support me. I needed something underneath me to hold me up. When you understand what faith is you know that faith is what God uses to hold you up and support you through life. Faith is the substance, the sub-stance of your life.

Faith is the assurance of what you hope for and it is the substance of what you hope for, but **faith is also the *reality* of what we hope for (HCSB).** The word "reality" refers to the authenticity of something. Faith makes something real to you, even when you cannot see it. This word *reality* was used in legal circles of a "guarantee" and of a "title deed" to property. If someone in your family were to die and you were told that you inherited some land. Land that you didn't know even existed and was part of the family. But you inherited it. A person would give you the title deed and say to you, "That's the title deed and that guarantees the land is yours." That title deed and guarantee makes something you have not even seen a reality to you. It's just a matter of going to the land and experiencing it. That's what faith is and does, it is the reality or the title deed to your heavenly inheritance and all of God's promises.

So when we are talking about faith we are talking about having assurance, a firm foundation under our lives, and the reality that what we hope for is true. Our faith, our assurance, our foundation, and the reality of our life is based on what we hope for. Now the Bible says, "Faith is being sure of what we hope for." But the questions you have to ask are, "What are you hoping for?" and "What are your hopes based on?" Biblical faith is based on the Bible. Whatever God says is what I base my assurance on. That's faith. Whatever God says is what supports and is the sub-stance of my life. That's faith. Whatever God says is the reality of my life regardless of what my feelings or circumstances say. That's faith.

Now what does it mean to “hope for” something in the Bible? This phrase “hope for” reminds us that there is something incomplete about our life. There are some things we need and want that we are without. So in God’s Word, God tells us some of the things we need and can have.

For example, we all need salvation. We all need to be saved from our sins. One of our hopes is to be saved. So God says if you want to be saved you need to believe and place your faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. That’s what **John 3:16** says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him [that’s the faith] shall not perish but have eternal life” [that’s the hope] (NIV). Our hope is to go to heaven, not hell. When we place our faith in Jesus Christ then our hope becomes a reality and a guarantee of our salvation. When we place our faith in Jesus Christ then our hope has a foundation to stand on and we gain an assurance that heaven is true because we have the title deed in our heart. We have not seen heaven yet, but know it’s there because of the faith on God’s Word becoming our foundation, reality and assurance that it is so.

Let me give you another example. You worry and you are too anxious and nervous about too much. Your hope is that someday you can overcome worry and fear. You are reading the Word of God one day and **Philippians 4:6** jumps out at you. It says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. [You are going to do that by faith, and what’s the result] (7) And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Your hope is to overcome worry. You discover that God says to bring that worry-situation to Him. God also promises to replace that worry with peace and calmness. You no longer worry because your faith, your assurance, your confidence, and your life is undergirded with a foundation that stands on God’s Word convinced that God will do what He says He will do.

Here is what happens. We read the Word of God and we think, “I sure hope that is really true?” When you read the Word of God and mix God’s truth with your faith then what you are hoping for becomes a reality in your life, it becomes the substance or foundation in your life, and you have a complete confidence and assurance that what you are hoping for will happen. You are convinced that it will happen. That’s faith.

Faith is Being Certain

So far we have seen that faith is being sure of what we hope for, but faith is also being certain of what we do not see. That's what **Hebrews 11:1** says, "Faith is being... certain of what we do not see."

What is it that "we do not see"? What is it that the natural eye cannot see, but yet is very real? I can see a tree and know it's real. What is real, but we cannot see it with our physical eye? The Bible talks about an invisible God and an invisible realm. In that spiritual realm are angels, demons, heaven, hell, and supernatural laws and principles that can only be seen and understood by faith.

What is it that causes me to believe and be certain of what I cannot see? Faith. Faith is the Christian's eye into the unseen. Faith is the key that opens the door to the spiritual. Faith is the x-ray glasses to see what's really behind the physical. Faith has been called the Christian's sixth sense into the spiritual.

To help us understand how faith is being certain of what we do not see, let's look at two words: *conviction* and *evidence*.

First, faith is the conviction of things not seen (NASB). The person of faith lives his belief. His life is committed to what his mind and his spirit are *convinced* is true based on God's Word.

Noah, for example, truly believed God. He could not possibly have embarked on the enormous, demanding, and humanly ridiculous task God gave him without having had absolute faith. When God predicted rain, Noah had no concept of what rain was, because rain did not exist before the Flood. It is possible that Noah did not even know how to build a boat, much less a gigantic ark. But Noah believed God and acted on God's instructions. He acted on faith. His outward building of the ark bore out his inward belief that the rain was coming and that God's plan was correct for building a boat that would float. His faith was based on God's word, not on what he could see or on what He had experienced. For 120 years he preached in faith, hoped in faith, and built in faith. Noah had a faith, a conviction of things not seen.

Do you have a conviction of things not seen? Are you convinced the Bible is true? The Bible says in Romans 12:1-2 that you can know the will of God if you will offer yourself as a living sacrifice and renew your mind on His Word. Faith is convinced of that. Faith believes that to be true to the point of applying it to one's life.

Faith is the conviction of things not seen, but faith is also the evidence of things not seen (KJV). What does that mean? Well, you might ask, “How do you know there is a God? How do you know the Bible is true? How do you know there is a heaven? How do you know Jesus is coming again?” Well, I’ve got faith and that faith is the evidence that these things are so.

Now watch this. Faith does not make these things so. Some people think if you believe hard enough, that wishing will make it so. That’s not faith. Some people think faith is positive thinking and hoping everything will just work itself out. That’s not faith. Things don’t come into being because I have faith. I have faith because things are already into being. Faith is evidence of what is already true. Believing does not make it so, I believe because it is so. My faith is evidence that it is so. You cannot have faith for anything that is not so. It has to be so before you can have faith. Faith is rooted and built on truth, the Word of God.

Conclusion

Faith connects us with that which our senses cannot detect. Faith is a firm conviction about something we cannot see, hear, feel, taste, or touch, but which is nevertheless very real. **2 Corinthians 4:18** says, “We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (NIV). Faith brings the invisible realm into spiritual view. This is why we are told to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). The real important things in life, you cannot see with the eye, but only with the eye of faith.

Whether you believe it or not, there is an unseen spiritual realm. The Bible refers to this realm over and over again. In this spiritual realm is where you find heaven and hell. When you die, you will step into the realm completely. Your relationship with Jesus Christ will determine what you experience there. God wants you to experience heaven. **John 3:16** says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes [has faith] in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (NIV). If you will place your faith in Jesus Christ the Bible says you will not go to hell, but will have eternal life in heaven. Are you ready to do that? Are you ready to make the most important and significant decision of your life? If you are, I want to lead you in a prayer to receive Jesus Christ as the Lord of your life.