

# Faith that Endures, Teacher's Guide

## Lesson 1: What Real Faith Looks Like

### Hebrews 11:1-7

#### Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Before you touch the definition, put the chapter back where it belongs, because it is almost always taught as a trophy case and it is a different thing when you do. Hebrews was written to Christians who were worn down. They had believed and paid for it, and the writer has just reminded them of it: public abuse, prison, the plundering of their property (Hebrews 10:32-34). Then he says the thing that sets up chapter 11: “we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls” (Hebrews 10:39). Chapter 11 is not an inspirational gallery. It is evidence, gathered for tired people, that this way of living has always been how God's people survived. Help your class hear it as an argument rather than a museum tour.

Then notice what the writer does first. He does not start with a story. He starts with a definition, and then he starts with the beginning of the world, and only then does he name Abel. That order matters. Verse 1 tells the class what faith is, verse 2 tells them what it earns, verse 3 tells them what it grasps, and verses 4 through 7 show them what it does. And watch the pattern that begins in verse 4 and runs for the rest of the chapter: “By faith Abel offered.” “By faith Enoch was taken up.” “By faith Noah, being warned, constructed.” Every entry has a verb. The writer never once describes a faith that only agreed with something. If your class carries away nothing else, let it be that this chapter defines faith by what it made people do.

Two boundaries need a steady hand. First, verse 6 says “without faith it is impossible to please him,” and someone will hear salvation by faith alone in it. Read the chapter around it. Every commended person in it acted, and this same letter calls Jesus “the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (Hebrews 5:9). Faith is not the alternative to obedience; obedience is the shape faith takes. Second, be careful with Enoch. “Walked with God” invites a mystical reading, as though closeness to God were an inner voice to be waited for. Enoch walked with a God who had spoken; we walk with a God who has spoken to us in His Son and left us His completed Word (Hebrews 1:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Aim the hour at a class that leaves knowing faith is not a feeling they must generate but a Person they can take at His word.

#### Question 1

##### Student Question:

*In verse 1, the writer describes faith as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” What is the difference between biblical faith and mere optimism or wishful thinking?*

## **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Slow down on the two nouns, because the whole definition lives in them. “Assurance” translates hypostasis, a word that means substance, or that which stands underneath and holds a thing up. It is used of Christ as “the exact imprint of his nature” in Hebrews 1:3. “Conviction” translates elenchos, a courtroom word for evidence, the proof that settles a case. So faith is not a mood hovering over the future. It is what gives the things God promised a present weight, and what functions as proof of realities we have not laid eyes on.

Now make the contrast the question asks for, and make it plainly. Optimism has no object. It is a temperament, a hopeful lean, and it rests on nothing but the hoper. Biblical faith rests entirely on someone else. Ask the class the diagnostic question: why do you believe what you believe about the future? If the answer is “I feel like it will work out,” that is optimism. If the answer is “God said so,” that is faith. Optimism is confidence in an outcome. Faith is confidence in a Person who has spoken about the outcome.

That means faith is not a leap in the dark, and your class needs to hear you say it. Faith comes by hearing the word of Christ (Romans 10:17). It is a response to testimony, which is exactly why elenchos, an evidence word, sits in the definition. God has spoken, and He has given His word in writing, and believing Him is the most reasonable act a creature can perform. Guard the class here against a popular error that treats faith as belief without reason. Scripture never asks anyone to believe nothing on the basis of nothing.

Then take up “things not seen,” which is the honest part. Unseen does not mean unreal. Paul says “the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal,” and “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 4:18; 5:7). The unseen things are the more solid ones. Help the class feel the reversal in that. We normally treat what we can touch as real and what God promised as theoretical, and this verse says we have it exactly backward.

Bring it near. Ask your class what they are actually holding on to right now, and where it came from. A worn-out Christian does not usually need more optimism, and telling him to cheer up will not help him. What he needs is to be told again what God said, because that is the only thing that has any substance under it. That is what this whole chapter is about to do for him.

## **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- “Assurance” (hypostasis) means substance, that which stands under and holds a thing up (Hebrews 1:3; 11:1)
- “Conviction” (elenchos) is an evidence word, the proof that settles a case
- Optimism rests on the hoper; faith rests on a Person who has spoken
- Faith is a response to testimony, not a leap in the dark (Romans 10:17)
- Unseen does not mean unreal; the unseen things are the lasting ones (2 Corinthians 4:18; 5:7)
- Faith is not a feeling a Christian must generate but a word he can take God at

## Discussion Prompts

- Why do you believe what you believe about your own future? Where did it come from?
- What is the difference between telling a discouraged Christian to cheer up and telling him what God said?
- Which feels more real to you on an ordinary Tuesday, what you can see or what God promised?

## Question 2

### Student Question:

*Verse 2 says the people of old “received their commendation” through faith. What does it mean to be commended by God, and why does faith—rather than accomplishment—earn that commendation?*

### Commentary and Teaching Notes

Start with the word, because it is stronger than our English suggests. The verb is *martureo*, to bear witness, to testify about someone. It is the family of words we get “martyr” from. So the sense is that God testified about these people. He went on record. Notice how the writer repeats it in the very next verses: Abel “was commended as righteous,” and Enoch “was commended as having pleased God.” This is not applause. It is a verdict, spoken by the only One whose verdict finally counts.

Then let the class feel how startling that is against the lives involved. God bore witness to a man his own brother murdered, and to a man who prophesied against a generation that would not hear him (Jude 14-15), and to a man who spent a century building a boat while his neighbors watched. Not one of these men had a reputation worth having in his own time. Ask your class the plain question: whose commendation are they actually working for? John says some loved “the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God” (John 12:43), and he was talking about believers.

Now answer the question the student is asking, and be careful, because it is easy to answer it wrongly. Faith is commended rather than accomplishment because God is honored by being believed. To take God at His word is to treat Him as truthful, and to refuse is to call Him a liar (1 John 5:10). Accomplishment can be produced without any reference to God at all. Faith cannot. It is the one thing a creature offers that says, out loud, that God is who He says He is.

But guard the boundary immediately, because someone in your class will hear “not accomplishment” and land on faith alone. Read what the chapter actually says. Abel was commended when he offered. Enoch was commended for having pleased God, which took a lifetime of walking. Noah is commended for building. The commendation never attaches to a bare opinion. Faith is not commended instead of obedience; it is commended in the obedience,

because that is where faith becomes visible. This is not faith earning wages. It is God bearing witness to people who took Him seriously enough to move.

Bring it home quietly. Most of the faithfulness in your class this week will go entirely unnoticed. Nobody will see the man who kept his word when it cost him, or the woman who stayed patient with a difficult parent. Verse 2 says the record is being kept anyway, by Someone who does not miss things, and that is exactly the kind of thing an exhausted Christian needs to hear.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- “Commendation” (martureo) means God bore witness about them, a verdict rather than applause (Hebrews 11:2, 4, 5)
- God commends faith because faith honors Him by treating Him as truthful (1 John 5:10)
- Accomplishment can be produced without reference to God; faith cannot
- None of these men had a good reputation in his own time; God’s verdict is the one that counts (John 12:43)
- Against “faith only”: the commendation attaches to men who offered, walked, and built
- Faith is commended in the obedience, because that is where faith becomes visible

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Whose commendation are you actually working for this week?
- Why is being believed such an honor to God, and being doubted such an insult?
- If God commended Abel, Enoch, and Noah, what does that say about how He measures a life?

### **Question 3**

#### **Student Question:**

*According to verse 3, faith helps us understand that “the universe was created by the word of God.” How does belief in God as Creator shape everything else about the Christian worldview?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Notice first how odd it is that this verse is here at all. The writer has just defined faith, and the first thing he does with the definition is not a story about a person. It is creation. And notice the pronoun: “By faith we understand.” Not Abel, not Noah, us. Before he shows the class anyone else’s faith, he puts them inside an act of their own. Every one of us believes something about where the world came from, and nobody watched it happen.

Then look at what is understood: “the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” Two claims sit there. God made it, and He made it out of nothing that was already lying around. He did not shape existing material like a potter. He spoke, and there was something where there had been nothing (Genesis 1:3; Psalm

33:6, 9). Help your class feel the weight of that. The universe is not a thing God found. It is a thing God said.

Now draw out why this is foundational rather than merely interesting. If God made it, He owns it, and ownership settles the question of authority before it is asked. If He made us, He defines us, and human worth is not a social opinion (Genesis 1:27). If He made it out of nothing, then nothing in it is beyond His reach. And if He gave it a purpose, then our lives are not accidents looking for a meaning we invent. Everything a Christian believes about authority, morality, dignity, and hope has its footing here.

Be careful with one thing, though. “By faith we understand” is not a retreat from evidence, and your class should not leave thinking Christians believe in creation because thinking is not allowed. Paul says God’s invisible attributes “have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made” (Romans 1:20). The point of verse 3 is narrower and better: no observer was there, so the origin of everything is known the way this chapter says everything worth knowing is known, on the word of the God who was.

Land it where the writer aims it. This is a chapter about endurance, and here is why creation belongs at the front of it. The same word that made the worlds is the word that made the promises your class is being asked to hold on to. If God said “let there be light” and there was light, then His word about a city with foundations is not a stretch. Ask your class whether they trust the promises of God as much as they trust the ground under their feet, when the same voice made both.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- “By faith we understand” puts the reader inside an act of faith before any example is given (Hebrews 11:3)
- God created by speaking, not by shaping existing material (Genesis 1:3; Psalm 33:6, 9)
- If God made it, He owns it, and ownership settles the question of authority
- Human dignity rests on creation in God’s image, not on social opinion (Genesis 1:27)
- Faith in creation is not a retreat from evidence; creation itself testifies (Romans 1:20)
- The word that made the worlds is the word that made the promises we are asked to hold

### **Discussion Prompts**

- If God owns everything because He made it, what does that settle about your week?
- Do you trust God’s promises as much as you trust the ground under your feet? Why not, if the same voice made both?
- How would your view of your own worth change if creation were not true?

### **Question 4**

#### **Student Question:**

*In verse 4, Abel offered a “more acceptable sacrifice” than Cain. What made Abel’s offering acceptable, and what does this teach about approaching God on His terms rather than our own?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Let the class see what Hebrews says and what it does not say. It does not say Abel’s offering was better because animals outrank vegetables, or because he was a nicer man. It says, “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain.” The difference was faith. And since faith comes by hearing the word of Christ (Romans 10:17), and since nobody can have faith about something God never said, the text quietly tells us something Genesis leaves out. God had spoken. Abel did what God said. Cain did what seemed reasonable.

Then look at Genesis 4 with them, because the details reward it. Cain brought “an offering of the fruit of the ground.” Abel brought “of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions” (Genesis 4:3-4). Cain brought some. Abel brought the first and the best. But do not build the whole lesson on that, because Hebrews puts the weight elsewhere, on faith. The quality of Abel’s gift was the visible edge of an invisible thing: he believed God, so he gave God the best and gave it the way God asked.

Now guard the boundary this question is actually reaching for. Cain worshiped. He was sincere. He brought a real gift at real cost, and he was furious when it was refused, which tells you he expected it to work. And God did not accept it. Sincerity has never been the standard, and neither has effort, and neither has good intention. Nadab and Abihu were sincere too, and offered “unauthorized fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them” (Leviticus 10:1-2). The question in worship has never been whether we meant it. It is whether God asked for it.

Then be sure to show the class God’s tenderness in this story, because the passage is severe and He is not. He does not strike Cain. He reasons with him: “If you do well, will you not be accepted?” (Genesis 4:7). The door was standing open. Cain’s problem was never that God was hard to please. It was that Cain would not do the one thing God asked, and then resented the man who did. Warn your class gently about that second sin, because it is the one that killed Abel and it lives in congregations still.

Land it honestly. Ask your class where they are offering God what seems reasonable to them instead of what He actually said. It is a comfortable error, because it always feels devout from the inside. Cain never once thought he was rebelling. He thought he was worshiping, and the whole time he was choosing his own terms and calling it faith.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Hebrews locates the difference in faith, not in the produce (Hebrews 11:4; Romans 10:17)
- Faith requires a word from God, so God had spoken; Abel obeyed and Cain improvised
- Abel gave the firstborn and the fat portions; Cain brought some of the fruit (Genesis 4:3-4)
- Sincerity has never been the standard in worship; God’s authorization is (Leviticus 10:1-2)

- God reasoned with Cain and left the door open: “If you do well, will you not be accepted?” (Genesis 4:7)
- Choosing our own terms and calling it faith is a comfortable error; it feels devout from the inside

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where might you be offering God what seems reasonable to you rather than what He asked for?
- Why is sincerity not enough, if God is not hard to please?
- Cain resented the brother who obeyed. Where does that same reflex show up among Christians today?

### **Question 5**

#### **Student Question:**

*The passage says Abel “still speaks” even though he died (v. 4). In what sense does a life of faith continue to speak and influence others long after death?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Notice exactly what is said to speak, because it is easy to misread. “And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.” It is his faith that speaks. Later the writer mentions “the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” (Hebrews 12:24), which points back to Genesis 4:10, where Abel’s blood cried out from the ground for justice. But here in chapter 11, the thing still talking is not the blood. It is the faith. The man’s trust in God outlived the man by thousands of years.

Then let the class do the arithmetic, because it is staggering. Abel had the shortest recorded life of any man in Genesis. He wrote nothing. He built nothing. He left no children, no monument, no city, no book. He is given four verses, and the last thing that happens to him is that his brother kills him in a field. And he is still preaching this Sunday, in your class, right now. Ask them what that says about how God measures a life, because it is nothing like how we measure one.

Guard one boundary here, briefly and without alarm. This is not the dead communicating with the living, and Scripture forbids any attempt at that (Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Isaiah 8:19). Abel is not speaking to us; his faith is. What speaks is the record God preserved and the testimony a life left behind. Keep that clear and you spare your class a sentimental error that leads somewhere bad.

Now widen it to the ordinary people in the room, because they will assume this applies to Bible characters and not to them. Every Christian in your class was taught by someone. Somebody’s grandmother is still speaking. Somebody’s preacher, dead twenty years, still answers questions

in that man's head. Faith is handed down not primarily by argument but by watching, and the watching does not stop when the person does. Paul told Timothy he had seen the faith that "dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice" (2 Timothy 1:5). Neither woman knew what she was building.

Land it personally, and let it sit. Ask your class what their faith will be saying when they cannot speak for it anymore. Not what they hope people will remember, but what is actually being observed right now, by children and neighbors and coworkers who are drawing conclusions about God from them. Abel never knew he was preaching. Neither do we, and that is exactly the point.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- It is Abel's faith that still speaks, not his blood; the blood cried for justice (Genesis 4:10; Hebrews 12:24)
- Abel left no writings, no children, and no monument, and is still teaching thousands of years later
- God measures a life by faith, not by output or length
- This is not the dead communicating with the living, which Scripture forbids (Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Isaiah 8:19)
- Faith is handed down by being watched, as with Lois and Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5)
- Abel never knew he was preaching, which is true of every faithful life

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Who is still speaking to you, and what did they actually do?
- What is your faith saying right now to the people watching you who never mention it?
- Why does God apparently measure a life so differently than we do?

### **Question 6**

#### **Student Question:**

*Verse 5 tells us Enoch "was taken up so that he should not see death" because "he had pleased God." What does it mean to walk with God so closely that your life becomes a testimony of faith?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Take the class back to Genesis 5 first, because the setting is the sermon. The chapter is a genealogy, and it has a rhythm you can hear: he lived, he fathered sons and daughters, and he died. Over and over, eight times, "and he died." Then the rhythm breaks. "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him" (Genesis 5:24). In a chapter that is essentially a list of funerals, one man does not get one. Let your class hear the drumbeat before you point out the silence.

Then look at the phrase itself, because “walked with God” is doing real work. A walk has a direction, which means agreement. Amos asks, “Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet?” (Amos 3:3). A walk has duration; Genesis says Enoch did it for three hundred years. And a walk is made of steps, none of them dramatic. That is the answer to the student’s question, and it will disappoint anyone hoping for a technique. Closeness to God is not an event. It is the accumulated weight of a great many ordinary days pointed the same direction.

Now guard the boundary, because this phrase is the one people mystify. Your class may hear “walking with God” and picture an inner voice, a prompting, a sense in the heart that God is telling them something. Do not let that stand, and do not be harsh about it either, because the people who talk this way are usually hungry rather than rebellious. Enoch walked with a God who had spoken to him. We walk with a God who has spoken to us in His Son and left us the completed Word (Hebrews 1:1-2; Jude 3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Nobody has to wait for a feeling to know God’s mind. It is written down, and that is a mercy, not a limitation.

Then notice what Enoch’s walk was not. It was not withdrawal. Jude tells us Enoch prophesied against the ungodliness of his generation (Jude 14-15), and Genesis puts him in the line that runs straight into the world God would soon flood. This man walked with God against the current, surrounded by people going the other way, and the walking is what made the testimony. Nobody notices a man drifting with the crowd. They notice the one who will not.

Bring it home without romance. Ask your class what their last three hundred ordinary days have been pointed at, because that is what a walk is. Enoch pleased God, and the writer says it plainly, and the very next verse tells us how it is done: by faith. Not by intensity, not by experience, not by feeling close. By taking God at His word, one step at a time, for a very long time.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Genesis 5 repeats “and he died” eight times; Enoch breaks the rhythm (Genesis 5:24)
- A walk implies agreement, direction, and duration, not an event (Amos 3:3)
- Against mysticism: Enoch walked with a God who had spoken; God speaks to us now in His Son through the completed Word (Hebrews 1:1-2; Jude 3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- No Christian must wait for a prompting or inner voice to know God’s mind; it is written
- Enoch’s walk was not withdrawal; he preached against his generation’s ungodliness (Jude 14-15)
- Verse 6 tells us how Enoch pleased God: by faith, not by intensity or experience

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What have your last three hundred ordinary days been pointed at?
- Why is it a mercy rather than a limitation that God’s mind is written down?
- Enoch walked against the current. Where does that cost you most right now?

## Question 7

### Student Question:

*According to verse 6, “without faith it is impossible to please God.” Why is faith—not merely good behavior or religious activity—the foundation of a right relationship with God?*

### Commentary and Teaching Notes

Weigh the word “impossible,” because the writer chose the strongest one available. Not difficult, not unlikely. Impossible. And notice where it sits: right after Enoch, whose whole commendation was that he pleased God. The writer has just shown us a man who pleased God and now tells us there is exactly one way it can be done. Help your class feel that this is not a threat but an explanation. He is telling them what the walking was made of.

Then answer why. God is a Person, and relationships between persons run on trust. Refusing to believe someone is not a neutral act; it is an accusation. John says it flatly: “whoever does not believe God has made him a liar” (1 John 5:10). That is why good behavior alone cannot please Him. A man can be honest, generous, and dependable while treating God’s word as unreliable, and the whole moral performance still says God cannot be trusted. Behavior without faith is politeness toward a Person we do not believe.

The same is true of religious activity, and this is where Cain reappears. He was active. He brought something. Isaiah watched a whole nation do it and heard God say, “I have had enough of burnt offerings” (Isaiah 1:11). Activity is easy to produce and easy to hide behind, and a class full of lifelong church members needs to hear this said kindly and plainly. God has never been impressed by attendance. He is pleased by people who believe Him and then act like it.

Now guard the boundary, because this verse is regularly used to teach salvation by faith alone, and your class deserves the answer from the text rather than an argument. Look at the company this verse keeps. Every commended person in this chapter did something. This same letter says Jesus “became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (Hebrews 5:9). And the one place in all of Scripture where the phrase “faith alone” appears, it is denied: “a person is justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). Faith is not the alternative to obedience. It is the thing obedience is made of, which is why Hebrews 11 cannot describe faith without verbs.

Land it on the room. Ask your class the uncomfortable version: if God removed everything from your life that you do out of habit, duty, or appearance, what would be left that you do because you actually believe Him? That remainder is what this verse is talking about, and it is the only part that pleases Him.

### Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- “Impossible” is the strongest word available; there is one way to please God (Hebrews 11:6)
- Refusing to believe God is an accusation against His character (1 John 5:10)

- Behavior without faith is politeness toward a Person we do not trust
- Religious activity is easy to produce and easy to hide behind (Isaiah 1:11)
- Against “faith only”: Christ is the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9)
- The only occurrence of “faith alone” in Scripture denies it (James 2:24)
- Hebrews 11 cannot describe faith without verbs, because obedience is the shape faith takes

### **Discussion Prompts**

- If God removed everything you do from habit or duty, what would be left that you do because you believe Him?
- How would you kindly answer a friend who quotes this verse to prove salvation by faith alone?
- Why is unbelief an insult rather than merely a gap in knowledge?

### **Question 8**

#### **Student Question:**

*Verse 6 also says that those who draw near to God must believe “that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” Why are both of these beliefs essential to genuine faith?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Point out that the writer gives two beliefs, not one, and that your class almost certainly assumes the first is the whole thing. “Whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” Bare existence is the smaller claim. James says the demons clear that bar: “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe, and shudder” (James 2:19). Believing God exists puts a man in the company of devils. It is the second belief that puts him in the company of Enoch.

So take the second one carefully. “He rewards those who seek him.” This is a claim about God’s character, that He is not indifferent, that seeking Him is not futile, that He responds. Ask your class what a man’s religion looks like when he believes God is real but not responsive. It looks like dread, or duty, or a quiet resignation that shows up on Sunday and expects nothing. Plenty of people in our pews believe in God with a kind of exhausted certainty and have never once believed He would answer.

Guard the word “rewards” from two errors while you are here. It does not mean God owes us wages; Jesus told us to say “we are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty” (Luke 17:10). And it does not mean seeking God is a transaction where we produce and He pays. The reward is God’s to give freely, and the great reward turns out to be God Himself, as He told Abram: “I am your shield; your reward shall be very great” (Genesis 15:1). We are not earning. We are being told that the door opens when it is knocked on.

Then notice the verb “seek,” because it is not a one-time word. Paul told the Athenians God arranged the world “that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him” (Acts 17:27). Seeking has duration, like Enoch’s walking. This whole chapter is built out of verbs that take years. Faith in verse 6 is not a decision made once and filed away; it is a direction a person is still facing when he dies.

Land it on the series, because this is where the lesson touches endurance. Nobody keeps seeking a God he suspects is not listening. Cut out the second belief and the first will not hold a man through a hard decade. Ask your class honestly which of the two they actually doubt. In my experience it is almost never the first.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Two beliefs are required, not one: that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6)
- Bare belief in God’s existence is shared by demons (James 2:19)
- The second belief is about God’s character: He is not indifferent and seeking Him is not futile
- “Rewards” does not mean wages owed; we remain unworthy servants (Luke 17:10)
- The great reward is God Himself (Genesis 15:1)
- “Seek” is a word with duration, a direction a person is still facing when he dies (Acts 17:27)
- No one endures for a God he suspects is not listening

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Which of the two beliefs do you actually doubt? Be honest.
- What does a religion look like that believes God is real but not responsive?
- If the reward is God Himself, does that make seeking Him more attractive or less? Why?

### **Question 9**

#### **Student Question:**

*In verse 7, Noah acted “in reverent fear” and built an ark for events not yet seen. What does Noah’s obedience teach about the relationship between faith and action?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Read the verse slowly with the class, because it is a sequence and the order is the doctrine. “By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household.” God warned. Noah feared. Noah built. Faith did not stop at agreeing that a flood was coming. It picked up tools. And notice the phrase “events as yet unseen,” which drops us right back into verse 1. Noah is the definition with sawdust on it.

Then let the class feel the cost, because we know the ending and he did not. Genesis 6:22 says, “Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.” All of it. Specific dimensions, specific

wood, specific door, and no rain. For decades he built a boat nowhere near water, in front of neighbors, on nothing but the word of God, and 2 Peter calls him “a herald of righteousness” while he did it (2 Peter 2:5). Ask your class to imagine year eleven, or year forty. Faith is easy on the day it starts.

Now put faith and action together the way the text does, because your class will want to separate them. James says of Abraham exactly what Hebrews shows of Noah: “faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works” (James 2:22). The building was not added to Noah’s faith like a bonus. The building was his faith, worked out in cypress. Take away the ark and there is nothing left to call belief. He would simply have been a man who agreed with a weather report and drowned.

Guard the boundary here, kindly, because this is where “faith only” cannot survive contact with the text. Noah was not saved from the flood by believing in the flood. He was saved by an ark he believed enough to build, and God is the one who shut the door and floated it (Genesis 7:16). That is the pattern of everything God does. Peter draws the line himself: eight persons “were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you” (1 Peter 3:20-21). The obedience earned nothing. It was simply where the saving happened, because God said so.

Bring it home with the question the passage asks. What has God told your class that they believe and have not built? Almost nobody in the room disagrees with God about anything. They just have not picked up the hammer. Noah’s neighbors probably agreed the man was sincere, right up until it started raining.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The order is the doctrine: God warned, Noah feared, Noah built (Hebrews 11:7)
- “Events as yet unseen” ties Noah directly back to the definition in verse 1
- Noah did all that God commanded, for decades, with no rain in sight (Genesis 6:22; 2 Peter 2:5)
- Faith is active along with works and completed by works (James 2:22)
- Against “faith only”: Noah was saved by an ark he believed enough to build, and God shut the door (Genesis 7:16)
- Baptism corresponds to the flood and now saves us; the obedience earns nothing, it is where God saves (1 Peter 3:20-21)

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What has God told you that you believe and have not built?
- Why could Noah’s faith not exist without the ark?
- What do you think year forty of that project felt like, and what kept him going?

### **Question 10**

**Student Question:**

*Looking at these opening verses of Hebrews 11 as a whole, what foundation do they lay for enduring faith? How do Abel, Enoch, and Noah together illustrate what it means to trust God through every season of life?*

**Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Have the class assemble the passage, because the structure is the argument. Verse 1 says what faith is. Verse 2 says God bears witness to it. Verse 3 says it reaches back to the beginning of everything. Then verses 4 through 7 stop defining and start showing, and every example arrives with a verb attached: offered, walked, built. The foundation for enduring faith is laid in that order. Know what faith is, know that God is watching, know that His word made the worlds, and then go do something about it.

Then put the three men side by side, because what they have in common is not what your class expects. Abel obeyed God and was murdered for it. Enoch walked with God and never died at all. Noah believed God and spent a century in hard labor and then watched his whole world drown. Three men, one faith, three completely different outcomes. That is the most important thing in this lesson for a series about endurance. Faith is not a formula that produces a result. It is trust in a Person, and He does not run the same play twice.

Draw out what that spares your class. If faith worked like a formula, then every hard providence would be evidence of a failure somewhere, and every tired Christian in the room is already half-convinced of that. Abel demolishes it. He did exactly right and it killed him, and God's verdict on him is "righteous." Tell your class plainly: the presence of suffering in a faithful life is not evidence against the faith. This chapter goes on to say some were tortured, and that "the world was not worthy" of them (Hebrews 11:35-38).

Keep them from a sentimental reading, though, because the chapter will not allow it. These three did not merely feel confident. Every one of them was moved out of the ordinary current of his generation, and it cost each of them something. And guard the drift toward faith as an opinion one more time before you close, because it is the error the class is most likely to walk out with. This passage will not let anyone hold a belief that never became a verb.

End with the mirror, and make it specific. First, which of the three is your class most like right now? Some are Abel, doing right and paying for it. Some are Enoch, plodding through ordinary years and wondering if the plodding counts. Some are Noah, building something on nothing but a promise and feeling foolish. Then the second question, the one this whole lesson has been aiming at: what is the verb? Name it before the hour ends. Faith that stays a definition has never once endured anything.

**Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The structure is the argument: what faith is, that God witnesses it, that it grasps creation, and then what it does
- Every example arrives with a verb: offered, walked, built (Hebrews 11:4-7)
- Three men, one faith, three different outcomes; faith is not a formula that produces a result
- Suffering in a faithful life is not evidence against the faith; Abel did right and was murdered
- This chapter says the world was not worthy of some who were tortured (Hebrews 11:35-38)
- Against a sentimental reading: each of these men was moved out of his generation's current at cost
- Faith that stays a definition has never endured anything

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Which of the three are you most like right now: Abel, Enoch, or Noah?
- What is your verb? Name it before you leave.
- If faith were a formula, what would Abel's murder mean? What does it mean instead?