

**Hebrews 11:1-4**  
**June 12, 2016**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Jordan Spieth was playing in his first WGC match play event soon after he won his very first PGA tournament, the John Deere Classic. He was playing against Ernie Els for the third match, and he kept emotionally reacting to missed shots or putts, and Ernie took advantage of him. Every time Jordan beat himself up, Ernie would stay calm and keep stroking in putts. When Jordan was interviewed after his loss to Ernie, Jordan candidly called himself a “mental midget.” He admitted to letting missed shots get to him such that he had a hard time “forgetting” about it and just focus on the next shot that he controlled.

Q: I love the imagery of being a “mental midget.” Are we “midgets” when it comes to living by faith?

Q: Does our life reflect a large faith or small faith in God? [Let people wrestle with this.]

Q: What is faith? [Let people struggle with this. It’s both a noun and a verb!]

**Transition:** The author realizes that his readership is just like you and me. We all need to hear inspirational stories of God-followers who exercised great faith in God. We all appreciate good examples to follow, and the writer reminds us of key people whom exercised a large faith in God! Regardless of where you are on the continuum of small faith to large faith, **all of us can improve living by faith by following the EXAMPLES of those whom God commended.** Many theologians have nicknamed this chapter as “The Hall of Faith.” Let’s study the EXAMPLES of those who have been inducted into the Hall of Faith for how they lived by faith.

**BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Heb 11:1-3]**

V.1:

- Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

V.2:

- This is what the ancients were commended for.

V.3:

- By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. [The writer of Hebrews makes it clear that faith is a very practical thing (Heb. 11:3), in spite of what unbelievers say. Faith enables us to understand what God does.]

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: Based on the first three verses, what is faith? [Being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.]

Q: So is the author asking his readers to have blind faith? [No. True faith, as defined in Scripture, is not blind optimism or a manufactured “hope-so” feeling. Neither is it an intellectual assent to a doctrine. *True Bible faith is confident obedience to God’s Word in spite of circumstances and*

*consequences.* This faith operates quite simply. God speaks and we hear His Word. We trust His Word and act on it no matter what the circumstances are or what the consequences may be. The circumstances may be impossible, and the consequences frightening and unknown; but we obey God's Word just the same and believe Him to do what is right and what is best.]

***Faith is only as good as its object, and the object of our faith is God. Faith is not some "feeling" that we manufacture. It is our total response to what God has revealed in His Word.***

**[Read Heb 11:4]**

V.4:

- By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.

**Process Observations/Questions:**

X-Ref: Gen 4:1-7

Q: Who gained God's acceptance and why? [Abel gave God the fat portions of his firstborn, a superior sacrifice, as an act of worship.]

Q: What made Abel "righteous?" [He obeyed God, which makes someone "righteous."]

Q: Cain didn't have God's acceptance, why? [He didn't do what is right. He was religious, but not righteous. X-Ref I John 3:12]

Application: **Abel** represents the **righteous man** referred to in 10:38, whose acceptance before God was based on a superior sacrifice. Like Abel, the readers found acceptance before God on the basis of the better sacrifice of the New Covenant.

**LOOK:**

Q: Do you think our lives demonstrate a large faith in action that would draw a lost world to Christ?

Q: What did we learn from those who were inducted into the Hall of Faith that we can apply to help us improve living by faith?

**Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 317–318). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

This chapter introduces the final section of the epistle (Heb. 11–13) which I have called “A Superior Principle—Faith.” The fact that Christ is a superior Person (Heb. 1–6) and that He exercises a superior Priesthood (Heb. 7–10) ought to encourage us to put our trust in Him. The readers of this epistle were being tempted to go back into Judaism and put their faith in Moses. Their confidence was in the visible things of this world, not the invisible realities of God. Instead of going on to perfection (maturity), they were going “back to perdition [waste]” (Heb. 6:1; 10:39).

In Hebrews 11 all Christians are called to live by faith. In it, the writer discusses two important topics relating to faith.

### **The Description of Faith (Heb. 11:1–3)**

This is not a definition of faith but a description of what faith does and how it works. True Bible faith is not blind optimism or a manufactured “hope-so” feeling. Neither is it an intellectual assent to a doctrine. It is certainly not believing in spite of evidence! That would be superstition.

*True Bible faith is confident obedience to God's Word in spite of circumstances and consequences.* Read that last sentence again and let it soak into your mind and heart.

This faith operates quite simply. God speaks and we hear His Word. We trust His Word and act on it no matter what the circumstances are or what the consequences may be. The circumstances may be impossible, and the consequences frightening and unknown; but we obey God's Word just the same and believe Him to do what is right and what is best.

The unsaved world does not understand true Bible faith, probably because it sees so little faith in action in the church today. The cynical editor H.L. Mencken defined faith as “illogical belief in the occurrence of the impossible.” The world fails to realize that faith is only as good as its object, and the object of our faith is *God*. Faith is not some “feeling” that we manufacture. It is our total response to what God has revealed in His Word.

Three words in Hebrews 11:1–3 summarize what true Bible faith is: *substance*, *evidence*, and *witness*. The word translated “substance” means literally “to stand under, to support.” Faith is to a Christian what a foundation is to a house: it gives confidence and assurance that he will stand. So you might say, “Faith is the confidence of things hoped for.” When a believer has faith, it is God's way of giving him confidence and assurance that what is promised will be experienced.

The word *evidence* simply means “conviction.” This is the inward conviction from God that what He has promised, He will perform. The presence of God-given faith in one's heart is conviction enough that He will keep His Word.

*Witness* (KJV, “obtained a good report”) is an important word in Hebrews 11. It occurs not only in verse 2, but twice in verse 4, once in verse 5, and once in verse 39. The summary in Hebrews 12:1 calls this list of men and women “so great a cloud of witnesses.” They are witnesses to us because God witnessed to them. In each example cited, God gave witness to that person's faith. This witness was His divine approval on their lives and ministries.

The writer of Hebrews makes it clear that faith is a very practical thing (Heb. 11:3), in spite of what unbelievers say. Faith enables us to understand what God does. Faith enables us to see what others cannot see (note Heb. 11:7, 13, 27). As a result, faith enables us to do what others

cannot do! People laughed at these great men and women when they stepped out by faith, but God was with them and enabled them to succeed to His glory. Dr. J. Oswald Sanders put it perfectly: “Faith enables the believing soul to treat the future as present and the invisible as seen.”

The best way to grow in faith is to walk with the faithful. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to a summary of the lives and labors of great men and women of faith found in the Old Testament. In each instance, you will find the same elements of faith: (1) God spoke to them through His Word; (2) their inner selves were stirred in different ways; (3) they obeyed God; (4) He bore witness about them.

### **The Demonstration of Faith (Heb. 11:4–40)**

**Abel—faith worshiping (v. 4).** The background story is in Genesis 4:1–10. Abel was a righteous man because of faith (Matt. 23:35). God had revealed to Adam and his descendants the true way of worship, and Abel obeyed God by faith. In fact, his obedience cost him his life. Cain was not a child of God (1 John 3:12) because he did not have faith. He was religious but not righteous. Abel speaks to us today as the first martyr of the faith.

**Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, p. 807). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

#### *A. The life of faith (chap. 11)*

In concluding the previous warning section, the writer touched on the theme of living by faith (cf. 10:37–39). What this really means he then expounded in terms his readers could fully appreciate, because it is faith that underlies the experience of the heroes of Old Testament history. Since these people experienced faith, so could his readers.

#### **1. PROLOGUE (11:1–3)**

11:1–3. In a brief Prologue the author set forth three fundamental considerations about faith: its basic nature, the honor associated with it, and its way of seeing things. In its essence **faith is being sure** (*hypostasis*, rendered “being” in reference to God in 1:3) ... **and certain** (*elenchos*, from the verb *elenchō*, “to prove or convince”) about unseen hopes and realities. That this is honorable is seen in the fact that Old Testament worthies, **the ancients, were commended for it**. **Faith** is also a way of viewing all experience since it is the way in which believers see **the universe** (*tous aiōnas*, lit., “the ages,” also rendered “the universe” in 1:2) for what it is—a creation by God.

#### **2. THE DIVINE ACCEPTANCE OF FAITH (11:4)**

In the first major movement of his exposition, the author stressed the theme suggested in verse 2. Faith wins acceptance and reward from God.

11:4. **Abel** represents the **righteous man** referred to in 10:38, whose acceptance before God was based on a superior sacrifice. Like Abel, the readers found acceptance before God on the basis of the better sacrifice of the New Covenant. Their unbelieving brethren, like **Cain**, found no such divine approbation. Even death does not extinguish the testimony of a man like Abel.

**Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007).  
The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (p. 1835).  
Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.**

**11:1** Some people object that this is blind faith. In this verse, however, the writer described faith as a conviction of certainty about what cannot be seen. This kind of faith motivated men and women of faith in the past to live for God and trust Him to fulfill His promises.

© 2016 Lee Ann Penick