

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: HEBREWS 11:1-16**

To better understand that faith requires patience.

Read the Text:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 For by it the people of old received their commendation. 3 By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. 4 By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. 5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. 7 By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. 8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. 11 By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. 13 These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. (Heb. 11:1–16, ESV)

Study the Text:**What is Faith?**

Hebrews 11:1 contains the classic definition of faith: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” This definition essentially communicates that faith is anchored in a reality that is, crucially, not a *present* reality. Faith longs for the occurrence of something in the future that cannot

currently be grasped or seen (Heb. 11:3). Simply stated: *faith requires patience*. That is the claim, more or less, of verse 1, and several examples are given to warrant this claim in verses 2 through 16. Below is a breakdown of each.

ABEL

Abel is the first example given in verse 4. His story appears in Genesis 4:1–16, where he and his brother Cain both offer sacrifices to God. What's interesting about Cain and Abel's story is that both of their sacrifices seem to have been materially acceptable to God. Abel brought "the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions," which makes sense because he was "a keeper of sheep" (Gen. 4:3–4). Cain, on the other hand, was "a worker of the ground," and brought "an offering of the fruit of the ground" (Gen. 4:3). This should not be interpreted to mean somehow that the animal sacrifice was pleasing to God while the fruit of the ground was not. There is, likely, however, something to the juxtaposition of "firstborn of his flock" with "fruit of the ground." Notably, Cain did not bring the "first fruits" of his crops. Thus, the disparity in sacrifices was not in what was offered, but in the heart of the offerers. Abel brought the sacrifice to God willingly and generously, while Cain simply brought what he thought would suffice. This made Abel's sacrifice pleasing to God, but Cain's not, which made Cain furious (Gen. 4:5–6). Eventually, Cain murdered his brother as a result of his jealousy (Gen. 4:8) and faced subsequent punishment and banishment (Gen. 4:11–16). Verse 4 concludes, rather curiously: "And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks." What is meant by this? It's likely connected to Genesis 4:10, wherein God says to Cain: "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground." Hebrews is making the case that Abel, who lived by faith, is "still appealing to God for vindication, until he obtains it in full in the judgment to come."¹ In other words, Abel's faith for God to bring forth justice is patiently awaiting the final judgment.

ENOCK

The second example is the mysterious *Enoch*, mentioned first in Genesis 5:18–24, and only sparingly. Enoch was 65 years old when he fathered Methuselah, famous for being the oldest person in the Bible, living to be 969 years old. Enoch's faith was only possible because he "pleased God," and without faith, "it is impossible to please him" (Heb. 11:5–6). Verse 6 also reminds us that to draw near to God, we must "believe that he exists," which requires faith because God is not visible (1 Tim. 1:17). Thus, Enoch's faith requires patience, because not everything that God has made and set into motion has come to its fullness yet. He sought God and was rewarded because his seeking required faith, that is, belief in that which is not believable apart from faith.

NOAH

The third example is perhaps one of the most famous characters in the Old Testament: Noah. Noah's faith required incredible patience. God told Noah to prepare for *rain*, which Hebrews accurately describes as "an event yet unseen" (Heb. 11:7). At the time, water would simply come up from the ground to water the crops (Gen. 2:5). Noah worked tirelessly to build the ark, which took several decades, trusting that God would fulfill what he said he would do. Even then, he had to patiently await the floods to subside before returning to the land. He had to radically shift his life around God's commands without any visible confirmation that such a flood would come. Only patient faith made this possible.

ABRAHAM

Abraham is one of the three most important people in the Old Testament (along with Moses and David). Abraham is called to leave his home and go to a "foreign land" that God promised to give to him (Gen. 12:1–

¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 283–284.

9), living “in tents” with his sons who also trusted God for the same promise (Heb. 11:9). Hebrew states, however, that Abraham was looking to a future moment that did not come to pass in his lifetime: “he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.” In some sense, then, Abraham’s faith is still patiently awaiting fulfillment. More will be said about him in *Session 27*.

SARAH

Abraham’s wife is the fifth example in our passage; she had to wait patiently for God to open her womb “even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised” (Heb. 11:11). Sarah was required to believe that God could defy logic in bringing about a child in her womb. Neither Sarah nor Abraham lived to see the promise of God to multiply their offspring “as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore” (Heb. 11:12), and yet they still obeyed by faith.

What About Now?

Verses 13 through 16 provide a clear application for us: faith requires patience. Not only does it require patience, but often a patience that far extends our own lifetime. In each of these examples, they exhibited faith that is still, in some sense, not yet fully fulfilled. In other words, faith does not always solve your immediate problems. It is not always interested in the present moment. It often looks forward to eternity, knowing and trusting that God will do what he promised, even if it is impossible to see him working in the present moment.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Hebrews 11:1–3. What is faith? What do people receive by it? What does faith help us understand? How does this apply to you today?

2. Read Hebrews 11:4. How is Abel’s faith illustrated in this verse? How does this verse connect faith and righteousness? How does this apply to your worship?

Day Two

1. Read Hebrews 11:5–6. How is Enoch’s faith illustrated in this verse? What did his faith require of him?

2. Read Hebrews 11:7. How is Noah’s faith illustrated in this verse? What does “reverent fear” mean? What did his faithful obedience do to the world around him?

Day Three

1. Read Hebrews 11:8–10. How is Abraham’s faith illustrated in these verses? How did his faith require patience from him? To where (or when) did Abraham look?
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2. Read Hebrews 11:11–12. How is Sarah’s faith illustrated in these verses? Did she or Abraham live to see the fullness of God’s promises to them concerning their offspring?
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Day Four

1. Read Hebrews 11:13–14. What does verse 13 suggest about every one of these examples? Did their faith ever “fully arrive?” What were each of them seeking?
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2. Read Hebrews 11:15–16. Did they ever, metaphorically speaking, “look back?”
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Discuss the Text!

Session 26 Discussion: Patience

Hebrews 11:1–16 introduces the concept of faith and immediately presents the necessity of patience. Faith rarely ever solves something immediately imminent in our lives. Thus, believers are required to live out the fruit of the Spirit, of which patience is a part (Gal. 5:22–23). Talk as a group about the importance of patience in your life and what you need to do better to cultivate it in your walk with Christ.

1. Icebreaker: What is the *one thing* that tests your patience more than anything else? Why do you struggle with patience with it?
2. Would people in your life describe you as patient? Why or why not?
3. What’s the longest you’ve had to wait for God to answer a prayer? Or maybe you are still waiting. Regardless, share with the group how that waiting period has shaped you.
4. Have you ever prayed for patience? What usually follows?
5. Why do you think patience is listed in the fruit of the Spirit? How did the Lord exhibit patience?
6. Kid Talk: Imagine (or better, buy) a small pot and plant a seed in it with your child. Ask them what would happen if, every day, you dug it up to see if it had grown? What must you do instead for it to grow and flourish? Tell them that following God is similar to this. It takes daily steps of obedience, trusting that God will bring to fruition what you cannot currently see.

Takeaways:

1. Faith requires patience.
2. Faith enables us to believe in that which we cannot see.