

# What is Faith?

I have a friend who loves to climb. He is happiest hundreds of feet up in the air, with nothing but his skill and strength keeping him in place. One slip, one lapse of concentration, could bring a fall and terrible injury on the rocks below. What protects him? A rope, barely a centimetre thick.

He is of course not alone in this: the front cover picture shows how many climbers camp overnight, suspended by rope from the rock face. It is hard to imagine how one might sleep like this, but they do. And it is not a new phenomenon. I was fascinated with the stories around attempts to climb the north face of the Eiger, a mountain in



Switzerland. This was first achieved in 1938, and back then the climbers would tie themselves onto the rock face to sleep overnight. Apparently, they were so tired from their exertions that they would sleep soundly for several hours, despite the danger and the cold.

I once asked my friend how he could put his trust in such a flimsy lifeline. He answered that it was more than strong enough to hold the weight of several people, so why should he

worry? He has faith in the rope and is prepared to commit his life to it. I believe that the rope is as strong as its manufacturer claims, but would not trust it with my existence. That is the difference between faith and belief.

## The Bible Definition

In *Glad Tidings*, we often refer to Hebrews 11 as the ‘faith chapter’, as it tells the stories of men and women of faith, and why they are counted as faithful. The start of that chapter gives us a definition of faith:

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1).*

So, faith is more than just belief. It is about substance and evidence – it is based in reality. Faith is something we can see. How can this be, given that it is not a thing that we can pick up or show in a picture?

The writer acknowledges this in one of the first examples used in this chapter:

*By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible (v3).*

Genesis chapters 1 and 2 describe the creation, carried out by the word and power of God. We cannot see God, or His power, or His word, but we can see the world in which we live. That is evidence for those things we cannot see.

## Seeing the Invisible

The remainder of Hebrews 11 is dedicated to showing faith in action, helping us to 'see' what in practice is invisible. Faith is shown by people's response to it, and how they act upon it. It is shown by action:

*For by it the elders obtained a good testimony (v2).*

The first examples (in verses 4–7) are taken from the early chapters of Genesis. Abel was murdered by his brother, but had shown his faith in bringing the right sacrifice. Enoch pleased God in his life, showing faith. Noah prepared a huge boat, miles from the sea and in a world which had never seen rain. It is worth reading the stories in Genesis chapters 4–6 to experience the real drama in each case.

Each of these men believed God, trusted Him, and acted on that confidence, committing their lives to Him. This is faith. Seeing their actions, we witness their faith.

## Vital to Please God

More importantly, we are told that God recognised their faith. He accepted them because of their faith and credited it to them as 'righteousness' or being acceptable to God. Another good example of this is Abraham, a key figure in Hebrews 11:

*He believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness (Genesis 15:6).*

In fact, faith is not just important, it is critical if we want to be part of God's purpose:

*Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).*

## Committing to God

We all have the same opportunity to be part of God's plan. We can read our Bibles and understand what God wants to say to us. There is plenty of proof in the Bible that what it says is true, so we can believe it. Then we can commit ourselves to Him. Or we can choose not to.

Think about the climber and the rope. I can believe the rope is strong enough, but that belief alone will never get me up the rock face. My friend trusts the rope, has faith in it, and so gets to stand on top of the mountain, drinking in the view and excited by his achievement.

Faith is putting what we know into action, showing evidence for what is in our hearts. A life of faith will be fulfilling now, but more importantly brings us into God's family and His plan.

He wants to place us in His kingdom, to show us the whole of His purpose fulfilled. Let's trust Him, put what we can read into action, and be part of the great things God has prepared for those who love Him.

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