

The Message of the General Letters

Faith is the Substance

Hebrews 11: 1-6

Intro: The eight General Letters in the New Testament have various authors including two of the Twelve, Peter and John, and two half brothers of Jesus, James and Jude. We do not know who wrote the marvelous Book of Hebrews.

Over the next four weeks I am going to preach from great passages in four of these letters: Hebrews 11, James 2, 1 Peter 2, and 1 John 4. The messages today and next week have to do with faith. I think they complement each other, and I hope you will make an effort to come next week and see faith from the perspective of Pastor James.

Daily living is our concern in these messages. We are talking about facing the future, walking what we talk, being who we are, and loving like God has loved us.

I am convinced that faith can improve the quality of your life immediately. You can wake up in the morning enjoying new spiritual realities if you begin to walk in faith as a lifestyle.

I am going to mention several qualities of life that come out of faith, that result from faith. You will be able to find others. They are all here in this passage.

I. Faith Enables you to LEAP INTO THE FUTURE

A. Faith is forward-looking. It envisions the future. It moves into the future. Faith itself is the substance of things hoped for. Faith is itself the evidence of things not seen. When you see faith, you see more than the eye can see. When you see faith, you see possibilities and potential. You can no longer assess the landscape with simply the naked eye. When you see faith, you must throw into the mix the presence and power of God.

B. Faith is passionate about the future. Hope is an electrifying quality in its own right, a tremendous virtue. The human spirit cannot live without hope, we are told. And faith is the substance of things hoped for.

***Optimism has been shown by numerous studies to increase the quality of life, the length of life, and the productivity of life. More than 70% of Americans are optimistic about the next four years under President-elect Obama, according to a poll last week. **We see a great deal of optimism worldwide in the election of our new president.** I am glad it is so, and I join in that optimism. **This could be a new era in world-wide relations.** Why? It is because we serve a God who loves us and has great expectations for us.

C. Faith unleashes energy and creativity by envisioning the future.

1. We are never more motivated than when we believe in the blessing of the future.
2. We are never more creative than when we have envisioned a goal and are setting our course to pursue it.

D. Jesus kept his eye upon the sky. He was looking toward the goal. He was oriented toward the future. He refused to allow the traditions of men to replace the holiness and power of God.

II. Faith enables you to ACHIEVE MORAL INTEGRITY

A. In your intellectual world. Faith offers a beginning point for intellectual exercises. It starts by framing the worlds for us. The world is framed by the Word of God. The Word of God is prior to the world itself. This order allows me all the room I need to question and investigate, but it brings me back to a place of peace and security at the end of the day. There is no need to be polarized in our minds between science and faith or reason and faith. These qualities are not at odds with one another. They complement each other.

B. In your physical world. We believe that God created everything from nothing. We believe that

things are the way they are because the Master Designer established it to be so.

C. [In your moral world](#). Faith supplies the reason for our morality. It provides the ethics for our morals. Sometimes we say that this is right and that is wrong but we have no way of defending our judgment. People challenge us, and we can't even explain to them why we have made such a judgment. Faith is the foundation for acting and living.

D. Jesus achieved moral and spiritual integrity by trusting completely in the father in heaven, and obeying him in everything. This was the cornerstone of his life and behavior. "I have come to do the will of the Father and to finish his work."

III. Faith enables you to OFFER AN ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE

*** Sometimes you work all day, and what you achieve is really nothing. You do your work, but you do it without reference to a larger picture.

A. Only through faith did Abel offer a sacrifice that was acceptable. Cain's offering was rejected because it was not a faith offering. He brought his offering demanding that God recognize his hard work. Abel came in obedience, submitting to the will and law of God. This was faith in Abel.

B. [We want our worship to be acceptable](#). It will only be acceptable if it is offered in faith. That is, you must be focused upon the God whom you worship, not the trappings of worship. The physical logistics of worship are relatively unimportant. You can worship God with bagpipes or bongo drums, and people do all over the world. You can worship in the open air or the gothic cathedral, and each is as good as the other. But you cannot worship God without faith. Cain's act of worship was rejected because he lacked faith. The same will be true for you.

If we play Bach, will God be pleased? Not necessarily. If we sing "Shout to the Lord," will God be pleased? Not necessarily. The what, necessarily, will please God? Faith alone.

*** We bring our little worship report cards to church. Everyone is interested in his own preferred style, his own favorite hymns, his own choral or congregational mix. And God is interested in our hearts—in spirit and truth. Are we trusting him? Are we obeying him? Are we walking with him?

I believe the worship wars are an indication of our spiritual poverty. We are fighting over worship. What could the devil enjoy more?

C. [We want our gifts to be acceptable to a holy God](#). What will sanctify our gifts? Faith is all. It is through faith that Abel brought a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.

D. [We want our sacrifice to be acceptable](#). We could give our bodies to be burned, the apostle said, and without love it would profit us nothing. The love of which he speaks is linked to faith. It is the passionate love of God poured through people. The prophesy said that to obey is better than sacrifice. Obedience and faith are linked together throughout the Book of Hebrews. If you have faith, then you obey. If you do not have faith, then you are disobedient.

E. Jesus gave the most acceptable sacrifice of all. He did so because he lived in vital union with the Father. He lived in the faith perspective every day. He maintained moral purity and mental purity through his relationship with the Father. This was the secret to his life and work.

IV. Faith enables you to RECEIVE A GOOD REPORT CARD

*** We have a high regard in our house for the report card. It represents a lot to us in terms of energy, interest, and attention. The most important report card we will ever receive is the one from the Father in Heaven, the Judge of all the earth.

A. [The elders obtained a good report through faith](#). That was the source of their approval.

B. Enoch walked with God and was not, for God took him, the Scripture says. What happened to Enoch? He was walking with God in faith. His faith relationship to God was so powerful that it transcended all other bonds in his life. He had the testimony, through faith, that he pleased God.

C. [Without FAITH, it is impossible to please God](#), to get a good report card. Where does that begin? It begins in your salvation. We are not rescued by our own deeds or righteousness nor are we saved by religious works and rituals. We are saved only by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus.