

Lesson Plan & Study Guide



Basic Doctrines: Faith

Walking with Jesus

iFOLLOW

The iFollow Discipleship Series

Version 1.0 - 11/17/10



About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

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iFOLLOW

www.ifollowdiscipleship.org

Basic Doctrines: Faith

This presentation is designed for people who have decided to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand that faith is more than just belief but an experience of trust
2. Learn to help faith grow stronger through a relationship with Jesus
3. How to make faith the guiding principle in life

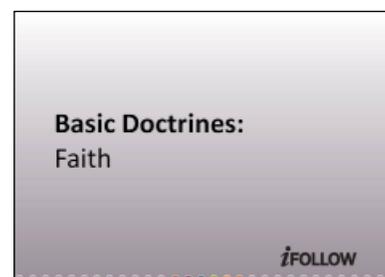
Content Outline

1. Faith: a gift from God
2. The basis of our faith
3. Exercising faith
4. Growing in faith
5. Faith in a personal God

Background Material for the Presenter

Faith is not to be confused with rational conviction. Faith in the biblical sense is not based primarily on our reason (even though it is not unreasonable or irrational!); nor is it based on our emotions (though emotions do play a role). Faith is a deep-rooted assurance that affects the entire person. Faith is a principle that governs the life. Faith is the means by which we reach out and grab hold of the promises of a God we can't see yet we know is there.

Hebrews 11:1 speaks about the "substance" of our faith. William G. Johnsson, an expert on Hebrews, suggests that the best translation is, "Faith is the title deed to what we hope for, the certainty of what we do not see." (Johnsson, p. 204)



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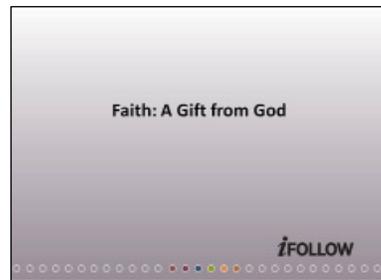
Action Plan
& Presenter
Notes

**Basic
Doctrines:**
Faith

1

Faith: a Gift from God

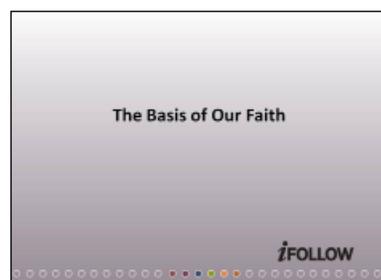
What is faith? A simple definition could read something like this: “Faith is a confident and obedient trust in the reality, power, and love of God as revealed in His acts and in His promises to us.” Many see this as the most wonderful gift a human could have, and those who don’t have that kind of assurance long for it, look for it everywhere. Have you been in that position? Are you, perhaps, still in that position now? Do you feel you have faith, or are growing faith? Where did your faith come from? How is it growing? Is it because of the people you are meeting who have faith? Has someone “talked you into it”? Is that even possible? Are you reading the Bible and other books, and do those convince you there is, or might be, a God who loves you? Have you found satisfying philosophical arguments that prepared you for the “leap” of faith? In the final analysis, faith is a miracle, a gift from God.



One thing is sure: Just as we cannot be fully human without love, we cannot be what we are intended to be without faith. As one author points out, “Without faith it is impossible to please God.’ ... Note that Hebrews does not teach that without faith it is difficult to please God, or that without faith it will take a long time to satisfy Him. To the contrary, it claims that it is impossible. In short, faith has no substitute. It is by faith that God’s heroes lived in the past, and it is by faith that His people must live today.” (Knight, p. 198)

The Basis of Our Faith

A famous English hymn, written in 1834 by Edward Mote and since translated into countless languages, reminds us, “My hope is built on nothing less / Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.” It is important that we never forget this truth. Jesus Christ is the ultimate foundation and source of our faith. But even though the gift of faith is a mystery that remains beyond our comprehension, we have been given some insights into how faith is awakened and strengthened. Some men and women in Bible times had a sudden experience that started them on the journey of faith. Paul is probably the most prominent example. Others tell of a much more gradual awareness of God’s leading in their life, which brought focus and direction in their pilgrimage of faith. No doubt, experience is an essential and powerful component of our spiritual life. But faith also must have content, and the revelation provided in the Scriptures plays the major role in establishing us in our faith.



Clearly, the Scriptures are of extreme importance, and if we neglect them it will be at our

own peril. But how the Scriptures exactly help to awaken and build our faith cannot be expressed in any human formula. Not even the famous faith definition of Hebrews 11 provides this. “Hebrews 11:1 doesn’t give us a definition of *pistis* (the Greek word for faith) so much as a description of the way faith works. Certainly the apostle isn’t advancing a psychological explanation of faith. Rather, he sets out the two cardinal abilities that faith makes possible—turning hope into reality and the unseen into sight.” (Johnsson, p. 205)

If, in fact, faith is the one essential element to pleasing God, and if it is true (as it indubitably is!) that God is far beyond our ability to understand or contact or communicate with, then obviously the burden of proof, so to speak, lies with God. We can’t manufacture faith, or talk ourselves or others into it. God has to give it to us.

Well, if that’s so, why doesn’t He just give it to everyone?

In a sense, He does. Romans 12:3 implies that God gives everyone “a measure” of faith. But He never forces anyone. That would be the ultimate betrayal of His love. We have to ask. Or at least, come to Him and say **Yes!**

When we refer to faith as a gift, we come up against the popular concept of faith as belief in a set of propositions of varying degrees of plausibility. People believe in all sorts of things, and just about everyone believes in something that isn’t subject to rational or empirical proof. But this is not the faith that is referred to here. Biblical faith is a result of the encounter with an infinitely good and trustworthy—that is to say, faithful—God. The gift of faith is truly the gift of God, because to truly know God is to trust Him. But in order to receive the gift of faith, we must make ourselves available to God.

Can we fake it? Not for long. It becomes obvious to others, if not to ourselves, that it’s not really there. “Phoning it in” is a phrase used by actors for a performance that is technically correct but obviously lacking in feeling or conviction. We can compare that to times when the Christian life is without faith. Without faith, we can’t please God, because we aren’t sure He exists and how can you love or trust someone you’re not sure is there? It can be a good and helpful first step, like the “fake it till you make it” of Alcoholics Anonymous fame. But there’s a difference between choosing to “act as if” God is there, and waiting for Him to manifest Himself, and just pretending. The difference is motivation. When someone fakes faith, it’s usually to impress others, not the supposedly non-existent God the actions are meant to be for.

Christians can go through the motions, but they will lack the conviction and joy that come from knowing why they are doing so. Because the Christian life is a long-term relationship, not a one-minute radio spot, eventually the person not anchored to Christ through faith will wander off to do something more immediately gratifying. And losing us to the world, the flesh, and the devil is what really hurts God.

Take careful aim: The Greek philosopher Zeno famously argued in his “arrow paradox” that an arrow would never reach its target. His argument turned on the assumption that every object occupies a space that is just its own size. So, at every point in its flight, the

object is “at rest.” Because the object is at rest, it is not moving, even though it appears that way. In this sense, it is indistinguishable from a motionless arrow in the same position. Thus, Zeno concluded, motion is an illusion.

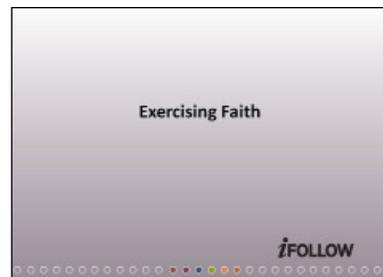
According to Zeno’s logic, then, we could shoot an arrow at someone’s chest and safely predict that it would never pierce the heart. Right? Unfortunately, we’d be dead wrong, as would be our target. Regardless of how logical Zeno’s arguments may be, there is little chance that anyone would be willing to volunteer for target practice to prove him right, especially Zeno, were he still alive.

Yet, Zeno’s paradox was meant to contradict, through logic and reasoning, some false ideas about the way people thought the universe worked. Since then, there have been a number of mathematical and philosophical attempts to solve his paradox about why the arrow reaches its target, even though, logically, it shouldn’t. (Paete)

In the same way, faith also poses a paradox of its own for the Christian. We don’t know how or why the “reason to believe” becomes saving faith, but we know it does. But first, we must aim at the target: to know Jesus as our personal Savior.

Exercising Faith

In their telling of the stories of Christ’s healing miracles, the Gospel writers emphasized that the underlying factor was not magic but faith. The people who were healed were challenged to exercise their faith. “According to your faith will it be done to you,” Jesus said (Matt. 9:29, NIV). Extraordinary experiences that carry an undeniable stamp of miraculous divine intervention do not always result in faith, however. The truth is that many people find ways of explaining such divine interventions away.



In Luke 16:30-31, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus says even if people came back from the dead and told others the truth about God, those who are determined not to believe wouldn’t.

Our faith will be strengthened by the experience of seeing God at work in our own lives and in the lives of others, but our faith often will precede God’s interventions in our life. Faith will expect God to show His hand, but will not necessarily wait for Him to do so. God has promised that He will act through us and on our behalf if we have faith in Him. In that trusting faith we must take Him at His word.

However, He won’t always act as we hope or expect He will! Faith also leaves the decisions to God. Faith, in order to be such, is the ability to believe in things that aren’t immediately apparent to the senses. When the Christian believes and trusts in God, the results of that faith make themselves known in the real world, coming from what is, to all appear-

ances, nothing. The famous “Faith Chapter” of the Bible, Hebrews 11, begins by pointing out that it is by faith that we understand that God created the visible world by using His invisible Word, creating something out of nothing. He can do that in our lives, too.

These surprises, becoming visible from “nothing,” may include a marked change in the character and orientation of the individual, answers to prayer, or positive results from decisions that seem far-fetched or disadvantageous by worldly standards, decisions made solely on the basis of faith or the sense that it was what God wanted one to do.

Growing in Faith

So what do we do with that feeble little bit of faith that makes us at least decide to “act as if ...” or fake it until we make it? Exercise it. Just like an accident victim struggling with tiny, one-pound weights in order to rebuild damaged muscles, so we can keep lifting up our “measure” of faith, no matter how tiny it seems.

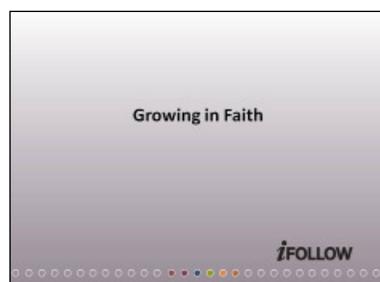
The eleventh century theologian Anselm of Canterbury wrote, “For I do not seek to understand in order that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand. For this too I believe, that ‘unless I believe, I shall not understand’ (Isaiah 7:9).”

Faith will increase if, when brought in contact with doubts and obstacles, we press on, claiming the promises of God regardless of how we might feel at any given moment or regardless of how hostile the circumstances might be. Faith is more than a feeling; it’s a principle that transcends the fickleness of human emotions. Faith is doing what we know God asks us to do even though we don’t feel like doing it.

If you are growing in grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ, you will improve every privilege and opportunity to gain more knowledge of the life and character of Christ; that is, you will do everything you can to grow in grace and increase in faith.

Faith in Jesus will grow as you become better acquainted with Him. This can happen by dwelling upon His life and love. You cannot dishonor God more than to profess to be His disciple while keeping yourself at a distance from Him.

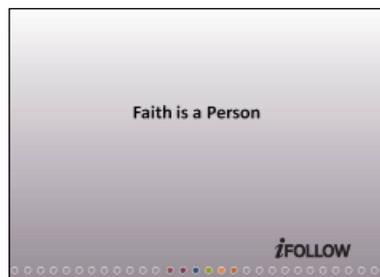
The goal of the Christian is to become mature in faith. This is a lifelong process. When people experience the blessing of growth and “stand firm in the faith” (1 Cor. 16:13, NIV), they may at times wonder why others are still “weak” (Rom. 14:1). There is often a tendency to forget that it also has taken most of them considerable time before they arrived where they are spiritually. And no one ever actually “arrives.” That moment of pride and judgment promptly damages the faith. God is the One who makes every seed of faith sprout, and He also is to be credited for any growth that takes place in our spiritual life. Yet, while that is a truth that must never be forgotten, we also must remember that by



our personal choices we can help create the right kind of environment in which spiritual growth can take place.

Faith in a Person

Doctrines are important. When we say that we believe in God, we will want to know more about God, and we will be eager to absorb what He has revealed to us. It only is natural that we want to provide a structured account of what we believe about our Creator and His dealings with us, and we want to be sure that we know His will. But though we believe that the doctrines of our church are true, our faith is anchored, not in a doctrinal system alone, but in Jesus. The doctrines are not an end in and of themselves. The doctrines help us better understand Jesus and what He has done for us.



In a sense, the role of doctrines in the Christian faith may be compared to the role of grammar. We can communicate through language only because there is a grammatical structure in the words we say and write. Similarly, we give a structure to the content of our faith through the doctrines. Anselm, quoted above, also spoke the famous words that theology is faith that seeks to understand itself.

Sound doctrine is essential, but doctrine and theology that remain lifeless theory can save no one. One even can be a theologian without being a believer. Faith, ultimately, is not just holding a number of beliefs as biblically correct but is trust in the Person of whom these doctrines speak.

In Matt. 16:13-19, Jesus asks His followers, "Who are people saying that I am?" After several answers, He asks, "But what do **you** think?" And Peter says, "You are the Christ (the Messiah), the Son of the living God!" Jesus answers:

"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." (Vs 16-17, NIV)

This passage often has been used as proof that the apostle Peter should be considered the founder of the Christian church. This idea finds no biblical support. On the contrary, Christ is the Stone on which the church is built. (See 1 Pet. 2:4-8.) And it is the faith in this Stone—the unshakable conviction that Jesus, the Son of God, is our Savior—that makes the church what it is, not a human institution but the church of God.

In conclusion, faith is experience. It has to do with certainty. And with trust. The Scriptures play a role in the awakening, the strengthening, and the sustenance of faith. But faith isn't just belief; it is a principle that guides how we live our lives before God and others.

Handout in this Package

1. Participant Notes



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Additional Resources

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- Crosby, T. E. (1988). *Is Your God Real?* Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.
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- Johnsson, William G. (1994). *Hebrews, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier*. Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association.
- Knight, George R. (2003). *Exploring Hebrews: A Devotional Commentary Hagerstown, MD*.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.
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- Schaeffer, F. A. (1968). *The God Who is There*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Scriven, Charles (1976). *The Demons Have Had It: A Theological ABC*. Nashville: Southern Publishing Association.
- Strobel, Lee (2000). *The Case for Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Wade, Loron (2009). *Simply Put: What God's Been Saying All Along*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Websites

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Discussion Questions

1. How can we position ourselves in a way that prepares us for the gift of faith? That is, what changes can we make in our lives to make us more receptive to that gift?
2. What role do the Scriptures play in the faith experience of the believer? Why is Bible reading a life-changing experience for some people while others claim that it “does nothing” for them? What questions would you ask a person who reads the Bible and enjoys it as literature but claims not to hear the voice of God speaking in it?
3. Why is faith more than intellectual assent to belief in the existence of God and other doctrines?
4. What circumstances, situations, discussions, books, sermons, and so forth, led you to have faith? At what point did knowledge about Christ become faith in Christ, and what did it feel like? What influences in your life now aim you toward Christ?
5. Though your faith is a gift, what good reasons do you have for it? Are there practical ways in which you can strengthen your faith? Are there things you need to guard against, that may damage it?
6. Share a time when you chose to maintain faith in God when apparently there was no evidence to support it.
7. Most of us have had moments when we felt as if we merely were going through the motions of a Christian life, without faith. What or who helped you to find the way back?
8. It is a fact of life that faith often coexists in us with doubt. How can we acknowledge the doubt and still make sure faith has the upper hand?

Group Activities

Activity 1

Purpose: To examine ways to grow or damage faith, and to learn from each other in this context.

Preparation: Have tables and writing materials, including enough paper for each participant to have one or more sheets.

Assignment: Divide the group into small teams at the tables. Give each class member a sheet of paper. Ask them to draw a line down the middle, creating two columns. At the top of one, have them write “faith building.” At the top of the other, have them write “faith diminishing.” Have the groups consult together to make lists in each column. Be sure to emphasize that this exercise is not necessarily a matter of drawing a line between “good” and “bad” things. First Corinthians 10:23 is instructive in this context.

Debrief: Invite each group to discuss their conclusions. Note what similarities and differences there are among the participants. Did they find that some things could actually change columns from one person to another?

Time: Allow 10 minutes in groups and another 10 minutes for discussion with the larger group.

Activity 2

Purpose: To examine specific ways in which the media in today’s information culture can be appropriated to grow one’s faith.

Preparation: The previous week, invite participants to bring in CDs, DVDs, etc. that have encouraged or strengthened their faith. It probably is most convenient (though not strictly necessary) if you have means to play selections from some of these materials. Best of all might be if some are willing to sing, quote, or otherwise perform from their favorites, especially songs as a way of closing the session.

Assignment: If possible, play or show selections. When that isn’t possible, have participants share what moved them and why, and especially if they can say specific ways their lives or habits have changed as a result of seeing or hearing these things.

Debrief: Most discussion will happen throughout this activity, which is best done with

the group as a whole. But you may want to especially ask questions like the following: What kind of attitude did you have when you saw/heard/experienced this media for the first time? That is, were you intentionally watching for spiritual lessons, or did they sneak up on you unawares? Could others perhaps gain an entirely different perspective from the same media? How is it that music, movies, etc., can help and guide us in our journey of faith, as well as hinder and mislead us? More interestingly, why can the same piece do the opposite for different people, and what can we learn from that?

Time: Allow at least an hour, depending on how much material is brought.

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Group
Activities

**Basic
Doctrines:**
Faith

Handout

Key Concepts: Faith Participant Notes

Scripture Focus: Ephesians 6:10-18; Hebrews 11; James 2:18, 19; 1 Peter 1:3-8

Concept: Faith guides the Christian life. It is more than being convicted in your mind. It impacts your daily choices and actions. Faith is an assurance in God's promise of salvation.

Connecting with the Scripture topic

- A. "I couldn't believe my eyes!" Have you ever said that? What was the situation?
- B. Reflect on the stories you hear. Must one "see" to "believe"? If so, why? If not, why not?

Sharing and Receiving Scripture

A. How would you describe the word "faith"? Think of an object you own (vehicle, appliance, consumer product, etc.) that you really believe is good. Try to describe it to someone else (with some enthusiasm). Then, end your pitch by saying, "I have faith in this product." Does this work as a definition for and use of "faith"? Why or why not?

Thought Questions

A. Is faith blind acceptance of something one cannot prove or is there more to it than that? Explain.

Read Ephesians 6:10-18. In the "armor of God" illustration we are called to "take up the shield of faith." What does this mean?

1. We have an active role to play in our warfare with Satan, not a passive one
2. Some translations say to "take with you" or "carry" this faith-shield.
3. Shields protect us from the enemy's fire ("flaming arrows of the evil one").
4. Our faith is obviously not in a "shield", but in the "shielding" power of God.
5. Other words used in Scripture for faith are trust, belief, and conviction.
6. Other...

Hebrews 11 is a chapter in the Bible often called "God's Hall of Faith." As you read through these "faith paintings" on the lives of men and women who trusted God,

pick one person you especially admire and share what inspires you most about that person.

1. Abel
2. Enoch
3. Noah
4. Abraham
5. Rahab
6. Other...

In James 2:18 and 19 we discover a common (and false) dichotomy people make about faith. What does James teach us about faith in these two verses?

1. We pit “faith” against “deeds” when they should be one single concept.
2. Breathing air makes a similar point; are we only taking air “in” or only letting air “out”?
3. If faith is thought of only as intellectually agreeing with something, is that true faith?
4. Some may say, “I believe in God,” but it doesn’t impact the thoughts and actions of their life
5. James says demons believe in God “and shudder.” Do they have more faith than Christians?
6. Other...

Peter praises God for a “living hope” in 1 Peter 1:3-9. As you read this passage, note the references to “faith” and reflect on what they add to our understanding of this important teaching.

1. Verse 3 talks about a “living hope”. Is this the same as faith?
2. Verse 5 speaks of faith that shields us until the coming of our salvation.
3. Verses 6, 7 tell us our faith is refined by trials.
4. Verse 7 also tells us our faith is of greater worth than gold.
5. Verse 9 explains that the goal of our faith is salvation.
6. Other...

Applying the Message of Scripture

Choose one of the following options and work on a solution. If you have opportunity, share your solution with someone else.

Option 1: Based upon what you have learned in this lesson, how would you explain the idea of sharing your “faith”? What might that look like? Put together a short pantomime with two people in which one shares his or her faith with the other.

Option 2: Could you put faith in a jar? If you could, what would be in the jar? Write on seven slips of paper what you have learned about faith in this lesson and put them

in the jar. Every day for a week, draw out one slip and read and reflect on it. Carry it with you that day and see if it influences your faith and action.

Option 3: Find a song or hymn that clearly speaks about faith. Use that song as your “theme song” for a day or a week. (Example: “My Hope is Built.”)

Valuing Scripture in Your life

A. What is one idea that really spoke to you in this session? What is one thing you can do this week to grow more in your faith?

B. Thank God for the gift of faith and ask God to pour out more faith into your life and the lives of those around you.

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